











THE GOSPEL AND THE CHURCH:  
A STUDY OF DISTORTION AND ITS REMEDY

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*By the same Author*

JESUS AND THE  
GOSPEL OF LOVE



# THE GOSPEL AND THE CHURCH:

*A Study of Distortion and its Remedy*

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## INTRODUCTORY

IN this age of crisis when the child is come to the birth and there is no strength to bring forth—when we are all conscious of the vast and terrifying possibilities which the new day must reveal—one chief question perplexes the world and afflicts particularly the Christian churches.

In its vaguest form this question is as old as mankind: how can I as an individual, the society to which I belong, and the world of men in general find power and purpose, not only for deliverance from disaster, but in order to change the potential calamities that afflict us into opportunities for fuller and more splendid living? Is mankind to sit helpless while the resources of the good life, resources now almost limitless, are perverted to our destruction? Or is there a means, any means, of rallying the energies of the race (or at least of that vast majority of its members which desires peace, friendliness and a sane use of its faculties), of reinforcing man's control of his environment and destiny, of releasing a higher potency of effective emotion, thought and action? Each one of us has known moments when he has stood before the doors of the future, and found them barred—has known too how in his despair the "Open Sesame" was spoken, and he entered into his promised land. Human history reveals such moments on the large scale when upon an age of perplexity and frustration the secret of power was disclosed and an event often seemingly trivial made all things new.

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For us to-day the gravity of the issue, its world-wide scope, and the vast extension of publicity and propaganda have given the question an almost maddening urgency. Like the priests of Baal upon Carmel we know that the time is short and the decision inescapable. Prophets, true or false, statesmen and politicians, students and men of affairs, churchmen and secularists, work themselves into a frenzy of prediction, exhortation, denunciation; and the resources of journalism and the advertising trade are at their disposal. There can be few of us who do not almost weekly receive particulars of some scheme which will admit us to Utopia; few who are not committed to one or many of the groups whose talents are devoted to the advocacy of such schemes. No wonder that the wiser ones among us look wistfully to the places (if in these days of broadcasting there still are places) where men care for simple things, for homes and the birth of children, for the ordered service of crops and herds, and for the changing changelessness of earth and sky.

For the Christian the question takes a sharper and more insistent form. He is committed to the belief that the word of power has been spoken; that in an epoch not unlike our own, an epoch of disillusionment and transition, the Word became flesh and dwelt among us. History, and the dating of our years from that event, encourage him to believe that resources are in fact available for a renewal of life. His profession lays upon him the responsibility of trusteeship for the secret: he belongs to a society which claims to know the answer to our need; he sees around him and on occasion experiences for himself proofs that the lordship of Christ is neither legendary nor exhausted. As he looks back over the centuries he can find encouragement not only from the revolution created by the earliest



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disciples, but from the fact that their faith (and his) has survived the collapse of civilisations and disclosed an amazing power to bring good out of evil. As he looks forward he can discern how much, how very much, in the present distress could be instruments in the fulfilment of his hope; he gets glimpses of the magnificent possibilities of the time and almost dares to trace in the present upheavals a purpose which rightly followed would issue in an apocalyptic transformation. There are occasions when he feels afresh the thrill of living in a Day of the Lord, when it seems as if the world-wide stage were set for a Coming of the Son of Man in glory, when he is confident that in Christ is the power for which we seek vainly elsewhere and when he wonders why he and his kin are so blind to the manifest signs of the times.

But when he faces the brute facts of the situation his faith is strained to the breaking point. Instead of the exaltation of spirit which he associates with his moments of religious awareness there is a chilly sense of doubt that verges upon despair: not only is the world vastly different from the rosy vision of his dreams, but even the obstacles which in the light of history he knows to be surmountable take on a precipitous and overwhelming magnitude. Every believer needs the rare "courage of the morning after" if he is to see his faith fulfilled: and to-day the atmosphere is that of three o'clock in the morning, and vitality is at its lowest. A nightmare of impotence oppresses us, and too often when we try to diagnose the situation and get to grips with the source of our distress the complexity and confusion of the situation only deepen our helplessness. As with the political so with the religious position there are too many alternative possibilities, too many things that ought to be done at once

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and simultaneously; and we do not know where to begin.

There is indeed in the churches a very close analogy (far too close for those of us who would believe in their divine heritage) with the general secular distress. Most of us are aware that something is desperately wrong—that adherents of all the denominations are decreasing, that public worship is being disregarded, that the best of our young people turn away from the service of institutional religion, that multitudes in every land are indifferent or hostile to it. Most of us, looking at ourselves or studying the doings of our official assemblies, are hardly surprised that to the world at large we seem to be fiddling while Rome burns. Many are conscious of the contrast between Jesus as the New Testament depicts Him and the societies which represent Him to-day, and focus their attention upon the effort to recall Christianity to the way and spirit of its Founder. But even so the task is more easily stated than undertaken; and the multitude of methods by which individuals and groups claim that it may be achieved does not make for unity or consistency of effort.

So far as the English-speaking world is concerned this bewilderment and sense of ineffectiveness are more responsible for the defeatism of Christians than the avowed attacks upon their faith whether in Russia and Germany or at home. My secularist friends will, I trust, forgive me if I say that in British and American eyes neither Communism nor Fascism commends itself as a desirable or indeed tolerable social order; and their persecution of Christianity has helped to estrange rather than to commend. Nor (and here I must ask their pardon more earnestly) does the quality of the professed unbe-

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lievers command among us quite the respect to-day which it merited a generation or two ago. The great Stoics and agnostics of the last century had a moral grandeur and a clear appreciation of values: one felt of them that like Samuel Butler they had renounced Christ for Christ's sake. Moreover their outlook was humane, dignified and unpopular. Is it altogether unfair to their descendants to say that, since D. H. Lawrence, Marcus Aurelius has been succeeded by Commodus? That there is genuine passion, intellectual power and moral worth among many of them especially the Communists none would dispute; but the intelligentsia, as a whole, so far as it is anti-religious, seems to-day singularly lacking in any of the attributes of greatness. They neither dream nor do—so far as the English-speaking peoples are concerned.

Indeed the very general recognition in recent years that neither personal character nor social righteousness can be based upon a foundation of scepticism should give to the Christian an opportunity such as he has not had for many generations. That he is in no position to take advantage of it only accentuates his malaise. When at last men whom he would gladly help are confessing that Stoicism is bankrupt and humanism unsatisfying, he ought to be able to offer to them what Justin or Origen did to the pagans of the Roman Empire. To some small extent this has been done: Roman Catholicism, at least in the years between the Treaty of Versailles and the Concordat, could show a notable list of converts; the Society of Friends, despite its refusal to proselytise, has commended the faith to very many; most denominations have had their influence. But in the main what has happened has been what our brief survey of the Christian's bewilderment suggested.

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The attitude of the inquirer is that of the demoniac when confronted by the sons of Sceva: he comes seeking deliverance to the churches, but their word of power only provokes from him the indignant cry "Jesus I know and Paul I recognise: but who are you?"<sup>1</sup> Institutional religion, in whatever denominational dress, strikes him as singularly unlike both in character and efficacy the splendour which he reverences in the Master and the energy which inspired His Apostle.

This indeed would seem to be the crux of our dilemma. That a notable revolution, transforming individual lives and changing the course of history, took place in the early years of the Christian movement is plain fact. That similar effects do not to-day accompany the ministries of the churches, is equally evident. Why is it that the churches lack power? Why do so large a number reverence and desire to follow Christ and yet when they make trial of the institutions which bear His name are repelled and disillusioned? That brings us to our subject. How can the churches recapture the secret which once was theirs?

To that question the answers given by Christians are many and various. They may be not unfairly divided into four chief sections.

First there are those of the Roman church or the Catholic tradition who maintain the organic continuity and indeed identity of the Church with Christ and so deny the evidence of any divergence between them and ascribe the present apostasy to the malignant influence of the devil and of his human agents—of whom Bolshevism is apparently the chief. No one in view of the history and devotion of Roman Catholics would wish to speak scornfully of this conviction; but for most of us the belief in the

<sup>1</sup>Acts xix. 15.

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inerrancy of the Church is a dogma flatly irreconcilable with the facts or with honest thinking. When Bishop Gore, for all his love of Catholicism, declared that on many occasions the Church had sinned and needed repentance, he stated what it is hard not to accept as self-evident. Certainly if we vindicate the sinlessness of the Church by separating it from its human representatives, so that it becomes a Platonic "idea"—eternal in the heavens, but never yet manifested upon earth—the claim of infallible authority for its pronouncements becomes insupportable. We cannot have it both ways. Moreover the claim is plainly inconsistent not only with past facts like the canonisation of Cyril of Alexandria or the activities of the Holy Office, but with the present attitude of Catholics in regard to the three vital issues of sex, property and war. Let anyone who feels attracted to this position read Bernanos's last book<sup>1</sup> and see how a devout Catholic is tortured by the effort to reconcile the facts of General Franco's campaigns with the blessing of the papacy upon his cause. For the plain man to accept the activities of the church in Spain as consistent with the Spirit of Christ is just to believe a lie: if that tragic record does not prove that the Church has erred, there is an end to honesty of outlook.

Secondly there are those who go to the other extreme and accepting the antithesis between Christ and institutional religion maintain that the only possibility is to break away from organised Christianity and make a fresh start on lines drawn directly from the New Testament. From the earliest times such experiments have been frequent and in the main valuable. The Apostolic age as embodied in the Scriptures is a norm by which subsequent developments must be checked; and the protests of

<sup>1</sup>*Les grands Cimetières sous la Lune*, translated as *A Diary of my Times*.

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the sects when the churches are false to the standards of their Founder deserve a respect which they have not always received. From the Reformation onwards, and particularly in cases like that of George Fox, the value of such methods has been demonstrated by their fruits. Judged by that test the Society of Friends can only be denied the status of Christian (as was in fact done by the Ecumenical Conference at Lausanne) by those who prefer tradition to truth. But the danger of such wholesale rejection of the churches' authority is manifest: not only does it inevitably add to the "scandal of our unhappy divisions" and weaken the solidarity of Christendom, but it almost inevitably leads to an exaggeration of the points on which the protest is based, to a rejection of much that is vital in the tradition, and to a self-conscious exclusiveness which easily leads to Pharisaism. The Oxford Group which is the most familiar of such movements in our own time illustrates both the power and the defects of this answer to our question. No one who knows its influence either upon individuals or upon Christian opinion will deny its worth: few will not equally recognise its exaggerations and distortions and regret its exclusiveness and air of superiority.

For the majority of us in Britain and America the problem cannot be solved on either of these lines. As Christians we recognise (more plainly to-day than in the last generation) the significance of the Church and the value of the churches. That a right understanding of the New Testament or of Christian history and experience affirms the basic importance of the community would be admitted by us all; and most of us who have joined some such community, however plainly we realise its defects, would not think to remedy them by renouncing it. Our obligation,

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as we understand the essential principle of our faith, is to work within the society to which we belong for its reformation. We would claim that the life of such a society depends upon its power to adapt itself to its environment; that there is in fact no proof that its organisation is petrified and unalterable; and that we should be forfeiting our responsibility and doing our best to destroy all hope of change if we lightly renounced our membership.

Nevertheless among those who share this conviction there are two types of response which can easily be set in antithesis.

The former of them urges that life must precede change, that only if the spiritual resources of its members are renewed and extended can any effective or wisely ordered reform be contemplated. As the number of genuine disciples increases and their lives are made more consistent and intense, they will be fit to devise and secure whatever modifications in the structure and character of the Church may be needed to express their faith. Inspired individuals can in fact rise above their surroundings, and defects of organisation in the society to which they belong need not prevent their appearance: without them reform will at best be ill-directed and artificial; with them it will be inevitable and easy. Moreover much of this eagerness for reconstructing the machinery of the Church is really an escape: men find it easier to devise new creeds or a new constitution than to consecrate their own lives; the reformers are really diverting their energies from primary to secondary tasks; at best if they succeed in liberating the Church from abuses they may find that they have cut the bonds from a corpse; revive the vitality of the body and it will burst its fetters for itself.

The truth of such a contention can hardly be denied—

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least of all by those who know how many attempts to deepen the spiritual life of the churches have been frustrated by side-tracking. Repeatedly of recent years when a prophet has proclaimed the need of rededication his message has been seized upon by a committee of practical persons, or ecclesiastics, his vision has been exploited in the interest of some trivial or partisan programme, and the sole fruit of his labour has been the creation of a fresh society for the attainment of a limited and irrelevant objective. We are all prone to find substitutes for self-surrender and "to chant formulæ over a wound that needs the knife";<sup>1</sup> and that as Sophocles truly remarked is not the method of the wise physician. However deep our conviction of the need for reform, we must not forget that the one essential revolution—and the only one immediately within our power, and God's, to effect—is our own conversion.

Yet the cry "Convert the individual, and the society will take care of itself" is too simple to be satisfying. We have seen it applied to social problems where its effect is often only to breed rebels and leave vested interests untouched! If we ask "to what then are the individuals to be converted?" we realise its inadequacy; for the basic gospel is so bound up with its traditional interpretation and present embodiments that we cannot make a man a Christian without alloy. Indeed the very core of our problem is the confusion between the dynamic faith of the Apostolic age and the developments, accretions and distortions by which our presentation of it has been affected. The experience of the Mission-field, where the best evangelists wish to present Christ and Christ alone to their converts, shows how inevitable it is for them to

<sup>1</sup>*Ajax* 582.



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present Him as a Western Sahib, if not as an Anglican or a Methodist. Whatever the proposed reform, the consecration of the reformers must be a primary element in it; but that we can effectively deepen the spiritual life without considering those aspects of it in which Christ and His Church seem at variance is, I fear, an illusion.

We are driven therefore to the conclusion that our question can only be answered if we are ready to take up the task of testing and sifting our institutions by reference to the Apostolic pattern. Admitting the evidence for a grievous disparity between the church of the first century and the churches of our own day, we have to discover if we can in what directions development has gone astray, before we can inquire to what extent and by what method recovery can be achieved. To do so is to attempt both diagnosis and cure. We shall not deny, as Catholicism tends to do, the existence of disease. Nor shall we proceed, as Protestants have often done, to advocate the killing of the patient and the creation of a new and better organism. Our business is to take the churches as they are, to discover if we can where and why their health has been impaired, and in the light of this examination to devise appropriate remedies.

This is of course what every responsible member and leader in our churches is doing; and it might seem to be presumptuous waste of time for a relatively irresponsible individual to add his quota to the effort. But, as we have claimed, the matter is for many of us desperately serious; and my own conviction that at present most of our efforts are vitiated by faulty diagnosis must excuse my immodesty. Such experience as I have had of the progressive movements and leaders in the churches reinforces for me the convictions formed by study of the New

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Testament and of Christian history and doctrine, and convinces me that the disease is at once more deep-seated and (I believe) more curable than most of my colleagues appear to realise. To set out my thesis it will be necessary first to examine the character of Apostolic Christianity; then to show how this character suffered distortion, particularly in the formative period between the second century and the collapse of the Western Empire; and finally to examine the extent to which this distortion if admitted can be rectified. About each of these three divisions of the subject something should be said before we deal directly with it. To say it now by way of introduction will save us from constant explanations and apologies hereafter.

To examine the Apostolic age is in itself a life-long task. The many-sidedness and vitality of its literature have been amply attested by the critical studies of the past century. One element after another in it has been fastened upon by scholars as the clue to its meaning, the core of its revelation. Repeatedly it has seemed that the riddle had now been solved and a just appreciation attained. Yet before the last word was said, a new angle of approach, a new factor in the evidence, has been discerned; and the quest begins anew. If, as Schweitzer so brilliantly argued,<sup>1</sup> there has been a real progress by the formulation of alternatives and the selection of one as against another, his thesis was even in its own day arbitrary and artificial; and more recent studies have often seemed to open every question afresh. Yet admitting the inconclusiveness of the critics and the complexity of the subject, it is, I believe, now possible to affirm without serious hesitation what was

<sup>1</sup>In his great book *Von Reimarus zu Wrede*, translated as *The Quest of the historical Jesus*.

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the content of the Apostolic preaching, to see its various aspects, proclamation and instruction, apocalyptic, ethics and doctrine, in relation to a central conviction and in a measure of proportion,<sup>1</sup> and to recognise that here is in the true sense a "mystery," an unveiling of reality, clear enough both to explain its revolutionary power and to supply a criterion by which future developments can be appraised.

The second part of our subject is less difficult; for the facts are less disputed, and it is chiefly in their interpretation that there has been confusion. We have to trace how the Christian community discharged its task of commending the "mystery" to the world. Admiration for the grandeur of their achievement must not blind us to the compromises and incompleteness which accompanied it. They were in fact doing what every preacher or teacher does—interpreting things too high for them into language and ideas intelligible to their hearers. All speech by its very nature "half conceals the soul within"; and in facing the mixed populations, Oriental, Hellenistic and Latin, of the ancient world, the Christian inevitably emphasised those points of contact which would win the sympathy of his audience and gave to his message a colour suited to their tradition and temperament. Before we condemn the resulting distortion, we should realise and acknowledge that such partial presentation of truth is as unavoidable in our own day as in theirs. If the gospel is as we maintain a revelation of the eternal, then any translation of it into terms of the transient must be inadequate. It is significant that the worship of the Pentecostal Church expressed itself in a wordless utterance, and that each interpreted it as best he could into the clumsier medium

<sup>1</sup>In this connection Professor C. H. Dodd's work is of especial value.

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of articulate speech. It is our business to record the distortions that occurred, not to blame those who in meeting the obligations of their day could only give what they and their hearers could understand.

Finally, if as we shall show the result of this process was to precipitate out a structure which failed in certain quite fundamental respects to represent the original revelation, we must examine how far this failure can now be remedied. It is obvious that if the damage is not due to any particular mishap, to individual sin or corporate apostasy, but to the conditions of natural growth, no superficial treatment will be adequate. Despite Sophocles we may doubt if a surgical operation is practicable or would be effective; for the whole life of the organism has been influenced for centuries by the defects of its structure; and only by a process analogous to that which originated the defect can it be remedied. Fortunately there are in our environment to-day certain tendencies which counteract those at work in the early centuries. If the churches continue the task of presenting the mystery to their contemporaries, they will inevitably lay stress upon the very elements which those centuries as inevitably minimised; and the organism will grow out of its malformations and gradually regain a less lop-sided development. If they understand the disease and its remedy, they can so direct their efforts as to promote a speedier recovery.

It is, as we shall see, precisely because of these new factors in the mental and spiritual life of to-day—factors which we cannot but recognise as in accordance with the mind of Christ—that our contemporaries find a contrast between Him and the institutions of Christendom. If in criticising the churches they usually concentrate upon trivialities, there underlies such objections a deep-seated

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awareness that in certain matters which they regard as fundamental the churches are misrepresenting their Master. It is because I share, and claim in some degree to understand, their objections, and because I do not believe that the urgent business of reform will succeed if it is piecemeal and palliative that I venture to set out what must seem to many a provocative and sweeping statement of the churches' failure.

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IN the confusion which still surrounds the problems of the origin, authenticity and character of the Gospels—confusion which the recent valuable but in my judgment exaggerated contentions of the Form-criticism have temporarily increased—it is well that the attention of scholars should be turned from attempts to recover the life-story of Jesus to the consideration of the effect which He produced and of the message in which that effect was proclaimed. That the person of its founder is basic to the whole Christian religion would not be disputed: but we are surely right in facing first His own question “What think ye of Christ?” before we debate the details of His ministry and teaching. For in the whole impact that He made upon His disciples, and in their conviction that in Him they had found a revelation that answered the needs of men and initiated the believer into a new way of life, was contained the secret which they set themselves to give to the world. In the events of His death and the experience of His resurrection they found the effective symbol of what He had taught and done. Details of His earthly life would come later: converts would require, and memory supply, material to expand the message and to set out what He had been in the days of His flesh. But it was not as prophet or leader, healer or herald of the Kingdom that He was first proclaimed. In the light of the event

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which had changed the world for them they could look back and recognise how congruous His ministry had been—just as they could look forward and see how a cultus, a creed, a code of conduct developed naturally out of it. But the first *kerygma* as it can be recovered from the New Testament is concerned only with the event and its inevitable significance. "In the fulness of time—and now is the appointed day—God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law, to be crucified for our transgressions and raised again for our justification, that in Him we might rise to newness of life." Such or something closely resembling it is the message which St. Peter proclaimed at Pentecost and which the New Testament with varying accents and increasing elaboration expands. Among the perplexities (and perversities) of Biblical scholarship we owe a debt of gratitude to those who have reminded us of the primacy of this plain announcement.

Its character deserves attention. To the modern ear its emphasis upon an act of God is strange. We record events without seeking to assign more than an earthly responsibility for them. But it is the grandeur of the Jew and indeed the natural consequence of any true theism that if there be a God He should be acclaimed as living and operative. It is this conviction of the reality and energy of God that gives its unity and its value to the Old Testament. If, as has been affirmed, the Hebrews had little sense of the significance of human conscience or intellect, and if in consequence their concept of God was often arbitrary and sometimes grotesque, at least they made no apologies for their insistence upon His supremacy, no compromise with the infidelity which banishes Him from concern with His world or the dualism which subordinates His activity to human or satanic conditions. The earth

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is the Lord's: God is master of men and events: be still and know and love. That is not the only moment in religious experience: it is the first and great commandment.

For this faith, vocal in prophets and psalmists and reiterated by the Apostles of Jesus, carries with it a necessary corollary; and in these days of unrestricted transcendentalism it is not unnecessary to insist upon it. If the earth is the Lord's, if God has sent forth Jesus, then nature and humanity are the appropriate scene of the divine operation: they are not and cannot be utterly corrupt and irredeemable: to the eye of faith not only do the heavens declare God's glory, but history manifests His purpose. Here again the Old Testament speaks with no uncertain voice: indeed more than any other people the Jews insist upon the reality and worth of the creation. To them the creaturely status does not imply degradation or involve the denunciation of this world. Rather it is the glory of the works of the Lord that they depend upon Him, manifest His nature, and at their peril disobey His behests. Other-worldliness finds little if any support in the older Scriptures; and the second commandment is inescapably linked with the first. We may hesitate as to the precise definition of our neighbour; but the love of God and the love of man are inseparably conjoined.

This insistence upon the worth of nature does not involve any blindness to the fact of sin or any melioristic belief in inevitable progress. Theologians who have stressed the Incarnation at the expense of or in separation from the Atonement have sometimes given occasion to such criticism. But in the *kerygma* the two doctrines are inseparably united. The world is God's world and re-



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deemable: but it needs redemption, and the instrument of redemption is the Cross. By His death Jesus fulfilled God's work in His martyrs "from the blood of Abel to the blood of Zachariah," and manifested the whole process of creation as an act of self-giving love. If "God so loved that He gave," then the creature's response to Him is similar in character. He who would follow must take up his cross daily. Creation and redemption are not contrasted but in the deepest sense identical; for if the divine intention is the manifestation of the sons of God, freedom with its penalties of sin and judgment must be the condition of all progress towards its fulfilment. Indeed the whole scheme, characterised by the great doctrines of Christendom, creation, incarnation, atonement and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, is an integral event. When the several aspects of it are separated one from the other, the coherence of the whole is destroyed and "the proportion of the faith" is distorted.

In affirming a unique act of God in the mission, the death and resurrection of Jesus the Apostles gave a fresh and fuller value to nature and to history. It was in the person of the Son of Man that God had visited and redeemed His people. The world is therefore not only the creation of the divine Word, or the theatre of the divine activity, it is in its supreme representative "patient of deity," not only congruous with God but capable of incarnating Him. Whatever the effects of sin, however deep the need for penitence, if God is in Christ, then nature and history cannot be wholly estranged from Him. The world, if it has once been fit to supply the embodiment of the Godhead, has received a worth and status that no subsequent apostasy can repudiate. If, as Clement of Alexandria maintained, we cannot think with shame of what

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God was not ashamed to make, still less can we despair of the nature which He deigned to take up into Himself. As it is the crux of our argument that this Christian valuation of nature and history has been abandoned and degraded by the churches, it is important to realise that it is an essential element in the earliest proclamation of the gospel.

That this element was regarded as essential is plain from the whole contents of the New Testament. From the earliest days the historic life of Jesus was felt to be vitally important. The first recorded act of the Apostles after the Ascension was to choose an eye-witness of the Ministry in place of Judas;<sup>1</sup> almost the last Apostolic utterance declares that it is Antichrist to deny that the Lord has come in the flesh.<sup>2</sup> No doubt from the beginning the *kerygma* was supplemented by the *didache*; and the stories about Jesus which form the substance of our Gospels began to be collected. This is due not merely to a desire to recall the memory of Him in whom God had acted, but from the plain fact that the vindication of Him by the resurrection attested the uniqueness of His person and was congruous with the quality of His words and works. Indeed it is impossible to regard the Gospels' witness to His authority—"what is this? a new teaching: with authority He commands the demons and they obey Him."<sup>3</sup> "This man speaks with authority and not like the Rabbis"<sup>4</sup>—as wholly coloured by subsequent events. The transition from wonder and expectation to recognition and confession as described in St. Mark is too evidently spontaneous, too evidently an unconscious reproduction of

<sup>1</sup>Acts i. 15-26.

<sup>2</sup>1 John iv. 3.

<sup>3</sup>Mark i. 27.

<sup>4</sup>Matthew vii. 29.

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what actually happened, to be lightly set aside.<sup>1</sup> Those who had heard and known Jesus did not find God's act inconsistent with their experience of Him; and if He was what they proclaimed, then every detail about Him became significant. That these should be preserved in "forms" suggested both by the conventions of Eastern story-telling and by the needs of their hearers does not in itself disprove their authenticity. Indeed in some respects it makes their manifest greatness all the more remarkable and thus confirms their historicity; for it is easier to suppose that one or two writers of genius could have produced such work than to believe it to be the product of a mass of anonymous catechists. We know from the Apocryphal Gospels what sort of thing the popular imagination produced: it is not in the least like those utterances which as Streeter rightly observed carry their own hall-mark.<sup>2</sup>

It may well appear that one element in the Gospels and indeed in the New Testament is hard to reconcile with belief in a vital interest in the ministry of Jesus, or with the valuation of nature and history for which we are contending. If it is true that Apocalyptic played a dominant part in the thought of the earliest Church and that an immediate and literal Second Coming was basal to its faith, then indeed it might seem that the interest in the teaching and works of Jesus was only apparent as the expectation of His return faded, and that the Apostles

<sup>1</sup>Without wishing to discuss the matter in detail I cannot but record my conviction that advocates of Form-criticism have signally failed to appreciate the mass of evidence that demonstrates something of exact historical sequence in St. Mark. The "Marcan Schema" may have been too precisely formulated: but it springs naturally out of a multitude of small proofs in the Gospel itself, and cannot be dismissed arbitrarily because it does not fit in with "Form" theories.

<sup>2</sup>cf. *Reality*, p. 209.

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could not have attached much significance to a world which was shortly to be brought to an end. In view of the volumes written in recent years on the subject, of its complexity and difficulty, it is not easy to deal with it briefly and without injustice.

Let it be said at once that the eschatological emphasis in the New Testament, the sense that these are the last times, that a new age has been initiated and tremendous issues are at stake, is manifestly part of the whole stress upon the majesty of God, the uniqueness of His act in Christ, and the urgency of the demands which that act makes. The world *is* living under judgment: a crisis is at hand and cannot be evaded: the decision is a matter of life and death. Similarly it is abundantly true that Apocalyptic, the language of catastrophe and expectation, is the inevitable medium for expressing the tremendous experiences which come to those whose earthly securities have been destroyed, whose conventional outlook has been shattered, who have been brought into the loneliness of death and there have found the living God. To such experiences only the language of darkened sun and shattered earth, of blood and fire and vapour of smoke, will do justice—and then only if they are not applied to literal or physical events but as symbolic of the tensions and ecstasies of the spirit. That Jewish prophets and poets knew this is plain; for the language of Apocalyptic is the language of all their descriptions of the energy of God. That such language is to be interpreted as if it described scientific phenomena is to mistake poetry for prose, and the spirit for the letter. Here, in Apocalyptic, is clear proof of that faith in the reality and activity of God to which the *kerygma* testifies, of the conviction that God who has acted in Christ has great, incalculable and immediate purposes in store, that

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only the hallowed language of former crises can do justice to the grandeur and terror of what is now actually happening. That the Apostles believed, as we do not believe, that the end of the physical universe might happen at any moment, may certainly be the case: they had little sense of its progressive development and none of geological time. But that their preaching drew its urgency or its contents from such a belief is inconsistent with the evidence alike of language and of events. That Apocalyptic which has made singularly little mark upon later Judaism was not taken literally by any Jews, is more than probable; that its use existed alongside of Christian interests and activities incompatible with its literal acceptance is demonstrable; that its language was replaced by other and less catastrophic imagery without any marked consciousness of change, is certain.

There is indeed one instance in the New Testament in which Apocalyptic was taken in all its crudity—by St. Paul's converts at Thessalonica. That the *parousia* as he there expounded it is no essential part of his teaching is tolerably certain; for it hardly appears in his earliest letter—to the Galatians—and is already being transmuted in that which follows—to the Corinthians—into the imagery of the body of Christ. That he came to Thessalonica eager to be all things to all men and not yet fully recovered from his indignities and resentment at Philippi; that he found a Greek sea-port agog with rumours and wild stories of portents; and that such an audience would take literally what a Jew would recognise as metaphor; these, as I have explained elsewhere,<sup>1</sup> indicate the cause of his incursion into Apocalyptic and account for his repentance and change of tone thereafter.

<sup>1</sup>*Jesus and the Gospel of Love*, pp. 308-11.

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It is indeed to St. Paul that we shall naturally turn in order to see whether our claim is justifiable: for not only is he the only New Testament writer who seems to disavow interest in "Christ after the flesh", but he is pre-eminently the authority whom those who would depreciate the valuation of nature and history cite as their witness. St. Paul, rightly or wrongly, has been made responsible for the Augustinian, Calvinistic and Barthian theologies; and though we might reasonably argue that, if his opinions justified such successors, in holding them he had already fallen away from Christ, yet the quality and influence of his work not less than its early date and manifest authenticity give him a supreme importance. So many of those who recognise the contrast between the Gospels and the Church lay the blame for the change upon the Apostle that in justice to him we must examine his actual teaching with some care.

Despite his declaration that even if he has known Christ after the flesh yet now he will know Him so no more<sup>1</sup>—a declaration which implies a closer knowledge of Jesus than is usually ascribed to him—he insists not less strongly than others upon the earthly life and manhood of the Master: this is proved by the nearest approach to a creed which the New Testament contains. In the opening sentence of the Epistle to the Romans he describes Christ as "born of the seed of David in respect to His flesh, but defined to be Son of God in an act of power by the resurrection from the dead in respect to His spirit of holiness;"<sup>2</sup> and if St. Paul lays stress rather upon His Davidic descent than upon the reality of His manhood this is manifestly because doubt on that subject has never occurred to him. His

<sup>1</sup>2 Cor. v. 16.

<sup>2</sup>Rom. i. 3, 4.

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insistence that he,<sup>1</sup> not less than the Apostles chosen during the earthly life of Jesus, has seen the Lord and received a similar apostolate from Him implies a similar certainty. Christ lived as man among men; His teaching and example are known and available: that is never in dispute, and can be taken for granted. But the gospel is concerned to maintain the resurrection—to insist that Jesus, crucified and therefore fallen under the curse of the Law, was not as Saul the persecutor had believed an impostor, but by the evidence of His risen and living power vindicated as against the Law and attested as Saviour and Lord. The stress falls not upon the reality of the earthly life but upon the continuity between past and present. St. Paul not less than St. Peter proclaims the Apostolic *kerygma*.

Moreover as has been shown vividly by Dr. Anderson Scott<sup>2</sup> there is far fuller reference to the historic character of Jesus in the Epistles than is commonly recognised. Under His influence St. Paul's own nature is changed; and his claim "I live: yet not I: Christ lives in me"<sup>3</sup> is justified. If in places he does less than justice to the full quality of his Master, if his own temperament and circumstances sometimes lead him into misrepresentation of Him, yet no one who compares carefully the Apostle's writings with the Gospels can fail to see so clear a correspondence, so large a moral and spiritual identity, as to make it certain that the disciple had known and pondered upon the deeds and words of Jesus far more intimately than his quotations and references suggest.

It is important to bear in mind this unquestioning acceptance of the historicity of Jesus because St. Paul's use of "mystery" and of language almost certainly

<sup>1</sup>1 Cor. ix. 1; 2 Cor. xi. 5.

<sup>2</sup>*Living Issues in N.T.*, pp. 1-33 and the authorities quoted, p. 33.

<sup>3</sup>Gal. ii. 20.

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derived from the mystery religions has given occasion to the belief that Pauline Christianity is hardly distinguishable from a refined and universalised Mithraism. It appears at first sight arguable that the Apostle, fastening upon the drama of Calvary and Easter, treated it as the "myth" of Persephone or of Attis was treated, and developed from it as other cults had done a system of initiation, ritual, ethic and fellowship; that for such a religion the earthly life of Jesus is irrelevant and may well be legendary; and that the Christianity which swept over the Empire was merely the most successful of the "mysteries" that competed with it.

On this matter Christendom has too often shown a sensitiveness amounting to irritability and revealing fear. From the time when Justin<sup>1</sup> declared that the devil had devised parodies of the Christian sacraments, the Church which has freely admitted its debt to the synagogue and to Platonism and been ready to acknowledge in pagan thought and legislation a *Praeparatio Evangelica* has looked askance at the suggestion of a similar debt to the mysteries. Even in recent times when the researches of Cumont, Reitzenstein and Bultmann have placed that debt beyond reasonable doubt, their work has been regarded by the generality of Christians as a threat to the gospel. Yet the success of the mystery religions in meeting spiritual needs which neither the official religions nor the schools of philosophy could satisfy, is not only testimony to the fact that dramatic action (such as the Church has itself used in the Mass) has greater power than any other medium to express and convey religious experience, but also explanation of the readiness of the first century to accept the "mystery" of Christ. That St. Paul

<sup>1</sup>*Apol.* i. 66.



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deliberately chose the language and some at least of the ideas of the mysteries in order to interpret the gospel need not, indeed I think cannot, be denied. Whether the results, as seen for example in the change from the Supper of the Lord in the first century to the Eucharist as described in Justin, be good or bad, the influence which promoted them must not be ignored.

But to argue that because St. Paul came to speak of Christ as "God's mystery" and to expound his message in the ideology of the cults, therefore the historical basis of Christianity is either negligible or non-existent, is simply to ignore the development of the Apostle's teaching. There is not a tittle of evidence to suggest that he knew or had ever heard of the "mysteries" at the time of his conversion or for many years afterwards. His ideas as expounded in the Epistle to the Galatians<sup>1</sup> move within the circle of his Rabbinic upbringing. Christ in spite of the curse upon every one that hangs upon the tree,<sup>2</sup> with which the Pharisees had taunted the crucified,<sup>3</sup> is God's Messiah. The authority of the Law has been disproved; the old dispensation of the Torah is at an end; a new age "of Christ" has begun. This is the Apostolic *kerygma* amplified in the light of St. Paul's own individual experience and of the problem of the relationship of Jews and Gentiles. There are hints of a wider interpretation, foreshadowings of ideas which dominate his later thinking: but of mystery influence there is, so far as a candid exegesis can detect, not a perceptible trace. Whatever the difficulties of detail as between the Epistle and the Acts, the background and setting of the former are supplied by the records of Jesus

<sup>1</sup>For a recent summary of the arguments in favour of an early date cf. Duncan, *Galatians*, pp. xxi-xxxi.

<sup>2</sup>Gal. iii. 13.

<sup>3</sup>Mark xv. 28-32.

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and of the Church of Jerusalem: they are Jewish—poles asunder from the atmosphere and mentality of the mysteries.

In view of his characteristic experience it is not surprising that St. Paul's first teaching should be concerned mainly with the release of the individual from sin and death, and with the work of Christ as bringing salvation to the believer and judgment upon the world. It was perhaps not until he went to Corinth that he focused it upon Christ crucified and began to give to the Cross a wider meaning than that of deliverance from the Law. It is not until the Epistle to the Romans that he expands the hints in Galatians and begins to universalise his gospel into a cosmic principle. Here when in the first chapter he insists that the condemnation and depravity of the Gentile world are due to its failure to recognise and respond to God's witness to Himself in His creation, he gives to the natural order a sacramental value incompatible with belief in its total corruption and reflecting the new status assigned to it in the *kerygma*. But he does not face the issue fully until he has expounded his doctrine of salvation. Then in the closing sections of Chapter VIII, at the very climax of his argument, he applies his doctrine of the Cross to the whole order of nature. It is as if he realised that a message of individual redemption however verifiable in fact and experience must be tested by its power to supply an interpretation of the universe: is it just a refuge appropriate to a remnant, or does Christ reveal not a way of redemption only but an illumination of the whole meaning of the creation? In this very notable passage<sup>1</sup> he asserts that the whole creation is as yet incomplete, frustrated not through its own will (for here he refuses to make

<sup>1</sup>Rom. viii. 18-39.

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Adam's fall or any act of the creature responsible) but by God's design; that this frustration and suffering are pregnant, the birth-pangs of a new order, the preparation for the coming of the sons of God; that God Himself far from being a mere external spectator is involved in the agony, since His Spirit shares in the groaning and travail of the creation; that therefore despite the pains of it we may be sure that all things work together for good to them that love God; and that neither present nor future, life nor death, can separate us from that love. We should not be justified in reading into his words a concept of the evolutionary process or even such an educational view of history as Greek thought would later formulate. But here plainly the Apostle indicates that God's act in the death and resurrection of Jesus is an event of universal significance, giving a new solution to the age-old problems of pain and evil and revealing the character and purpose of the whole cosmic process.

It was natural, having reached this conclusion, that when the needs of his converts forced the matter upon his attention, he should have recognised in the imagery of the mystery religions the mode best fitted to express his convictions. One of his supreme assets as an evangelist and teacher is indeed precisely this ability to clothe his message in terms and illustrations from any source which will help his readers to understand him: the epithet applied to him in scorn at Athens is one that he can carry as an honour.<sup>1</sup> So at Colossae when a dualistic and ascetic doctrine that denied all worth to the earthly life of Jesus and to the physical realm confronted him, he expounded the sufficiency and universality of Christ in a pattern borrowed from the cults and in language partly theirs and partly

<sup>1</sup>Acts xvii. 18.

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that of the Gnostic speculations with which he is in conflict.<sup>1</sup> Christ is "God's mystery in whom are stored all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge"—both philosophy and theosophy (if that is a permissible rendering of *gnosis*) find their fulfilment in Christ. He embodies the wholefulness, the totality, of Godhead in physical form. He is the image of the invisible God—that image in which according to the book of Genesis mankind was made. He is therefore the firstling of all the creation, as He is also its creative and sustaining principle. As such He is the head of the body incorporated by Him, the fellowship of the mystery—a theme developed more fully in the kindred Epistle to the Ephesians. That God's act in Christ has revealed a wholly new and abiding value in the natural order could hardly be more emphatically stated.

And as if it were deliberately designed in order to safeguard the Apostle against any suggestion that in emphasising the cosmic significance of Christ he has forgotten His historical manifestation, the Epistle to the Philippians which must be roughly contemporary insists that it is precisely because of His life and death on earth that Jesus has received "the name that is above every name" and with it the claim to the universal homage of creation.<sup>2</sup> Whatever be the precise meaning of the oft-quoted words "He emptied Himself of His glory" and whether they refer to His pre-incarnate or to His earthly self-humiliation, it is clear that the original preaching, with its insistence upon historical events, is being fully and consistently followed. If the Apostle does not hesitate to use the language of the "mysteries," his message differs radically from theirs because it consists not of the myth of a divine

<sup>1</sup>Col. i. 15-ii. 15.

<sup>2</sup>Phil. ii. 5-11.

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being but of the record of a Son of Man whose life on earth is the basis and content of the revelation.

Indeed St. Paul in thus exploring the consequences of the fact of Jesus is only doing what every one of us confronted with a new and unprecedented experience ought to set himself to do. He is working out step by step an integrated system of thought that shall be consistent with the new datum. Every moment of illumination should involve the recipient in a deliberate survey of his philosophy and religion, so that the experience may not be dismissed as illusion or segregated as a compensatory escape, but may influence his whole outlook and way of life. If the new event stands the test and approves itself as true, then no part of our make-up should remain uninfluenced by it. Being what we are, a full consistency may be unattainable: we cannot but be disobedient to the heavenly vision. But the obligation laid upon us remains, and if we would grow must not be evaded. St. Paul, confronted at the crisis of his conversion with what he regarded as overwhelming proof of the reality and significance of Jesus, created around that experience a Christ-centred character and scheme of thought. In the vivid evidence of his letters—letters written not like those of the younger Pliny with an eye to a literary public, but to meet actual situations and the concrete needs of his converts—we can trace something of the process and can assure ourselves that he does not start with a theory or a speculation but with what he at least regards as a fact. His own changed life, his career as a missionary, his conduct and ethical teaching, his rich, versatile and developing thought are all due to and based upon his conviction that Jesus has appeared to him and lives in and with him.

The claim which he came to make on behalf of the

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natural order that its true status is revealed by Christ is not, as has too often been assumed, inconsistent with his insistence upon sin and the need for redemption. Indeed the assumption that a truly Christian apprehension of the majesty of God and the saving power of Christ is incompatible with the ascription of any worth to this world is false both to St. Paul and to religious experience in general. It is precisely those who are most fully aware of the splendour of God and most conscious of the greatness of His gift in Christ who are most sensitive to the gulf that separates the creature from the Creator and of the need for the regeneration of themselves and of the world. That is why the prophets of Israel combine a sense of the sole sovereignty of God with a consciousness of guilt and of the exceeding sinfulness of sin: it is why saintliness can be measured by a deepened penitence. Only the man who has seen a vision of the most High ruling over His world can cry "Woe is me: for I am a man of unclean lips;"<sup>1</sup> only the disciple who is confronted with the miracle of Jesus can demand "Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord."<sup>2</sup> If St. Paul's view of nature had been the unrelieved and total condemnation which Paulinism has often ascribed to it, the power and poignancy of his teaching would have been impossible. It is because creation is redeemable and redemption is offered to it, that its continuance in sin becomes an outrage that cannot be tolerated; so too it is when the Apostle grows to a larger sense of the cosmic significance of Christ that he is released from all trace of self-satisfaction, from the contempt of others and the insistence upon his own status which appear in his earlier letters, and becomes conscious that he

<sup>1</sup>Isaiah vi. 5.

<sup>2</sup>Luke v. 8.

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has not himself yet attained or been made perfect,<sup>1</sup> conscious, if the Pastoral Epistles contain genuinely Pauline elements, that he is in a real sense the chief of sinners.<sup>2</sup>

For it is not in the shallow optimism of "God's in his heaven; all's right with the world" (and it is of course monstrously unfair to Browning to quote those words as if they expressed his whole thought) that the Christian valuation of nature, or indeed any profound appreciation of the physical universe, finds expression. St. Paul's mystery is Christ crucified: his discipline is to "know the fellowship of His sufferings"<sup>3</sup> and "fill up that which is lacking in them":<sup>4</sup> his gospel is one of redemption; and if he sees the world as founded in Christ, it is a world fashioned upon the pattern of the Cross. But depraved as it is, Christ's coming has revealed it to be in some measure *capax deitatis*, able to respond to and co-operate with His purposes, endowed by virtue of His creating and sustaining relationship to it with a value which makes the dominion of evil all the more detestable but which evil cannot utterly eradicate.

The insistence upon the universal dependence of the world upon Christ, rightly understood, makes the anti-thesis between nature and grace unreal and misleading. If the Pauline claims are true, then there is always and everywhere a relationship, a gracious, personal relationship, between God and His creation. This does not for sinner or saint imply perfection or minimise responsibility: it is always open to the creature to reject and "crucify afresh." But it excludes the type of theology which rigidly sunders the natural from the redeemed, regards the world

<sup>1</sup>Phil. iii. 11.

<sup>2</sup>1 Tim. i. 15.

<sup>3</sup>Phil. iii. 10.

<sup>4</sup>Col. i. 24.

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as a mass of corruption, and treats Christ as a divine intruder rescuing out of a wholly estranged and otherwise godless universe those who are elected to receive His salvation. Instead it sees glimpses of meaning in failure and frustration, and believes in the working out of a purpose of redemption not merely for a remnant but for creation itself. Creation is redeemable by virtue of its relatedness to Christ as its source and of His will to redeem it. His act, His death and resurrection, has manifested a process inherent in the whole character of the universe. By it the secret has been declared; the true quality and meaning of the universe are revealed; and Christ is seen no longer as an isolated and intrusive deliverer from the world but as its archetype and interpreter. "In Christ" is seen to be true not only of the believer, but of the whole scheme of things. By Him and by His life and death, His resurrection and living embodiment in His Church, creation is being delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of its fully achieved sonship when God shall be all in all.

To those whose outlook is coloured by the Paulinism traditional in the Reformed Churches and restated in our day by Dr. Barth it will seem almost an impertinence to set out so briefly a protest against what is here claimed to be a distorted version of the Apostle's teaching. Indeed to all who realise the profundity and versatility of his thought our summary treatment of one aspect of it will appear arbitrary and inadequate. It is of course true that any full exposition of his teaching would require a thorough examination of all his writings and a detailed exegesis of the passages which bear specially upon the subject; it would require a volume, many volumes, if the case for a revised verdict upon his meaning were to be



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validated. Such a treatise is badly needed both as a corrective to present tendencies in Continental theology and in view of the changed opinion as to the dating of the Epistle to the Galatians. But for our own present purpose it need not be indispensable. For we are concerned only to claim that his thought is consistent with the twofold character of the *kerygma*; and in demonstrating the influences by which the Apostolic valuation of nature and history was degraded we shall see how an exaggerated interpretation of Pauline theology came to be accepted, and the Apostle made responsible for a doctrine of total depravity inconsistent with his true position.

Others however, and they probably include the vast majority of British and American Christians, who have long since broken away from the Lutheran and Calvinistic attitude and who look rather to the Gospels than to St. Paul for their understanding of Christianity, may well feel it unnecessary to spend much time upon the attempt to show that St. Paul accepted a view of nature similar to his Master's. Reading his letters against the background not of the Reformers' dogmatics but of the Synoptic records they will find nothing new in our contention, or if they recognise a difference of emphasis between Gospels and Epistles will explain this as due merely to the Apostle's temperament and circumstances and will regard his authority as in any case supplementary rather than primary.

In the Gospels there can be little doubt that an incarnational or at least parabolic and sacramental view of nature is manifestly asserted. Not only do their records constantly depict Jesus as drawing the material for His teaching from lilies and birds, from the processes of growth and the handiworks of men, but they describe Him as

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amazed that mankind is blind to the care and presence of the Father in His world and to the "signs of the times" in its history. That Jesus saw the world always and everywhere as God's world is plain not only from the whole assumptions of His life and teaching, but from the immediacy with which He draws upon it for illustrations of His message and the spontaneity with which He meets every situation that confronts Him. That this confidence does not diminish His sense of sin or His insistence upon judgment and the eternal significance of the issues at stake within it, is not less plain. But for those who are ready to lose their lives for God's sake the Father's will can always and everywhere be done: the Cross is the final answer to the power of evil, and in the agony in the Garden and the dereliction upon Calvary the Father's kingdom is established.

It is unnecessary to elaborate this contention. But an example may indicate both the attitude of Jesus towards nature and the extent to which a distorted tradition has succeeded in obscuring it.

One of the shortest of the parables, found only in St. Mark,<sup>1</sup> draws attention, as is obvious both from its language and from its context, to the matter that we are considering. Its popular title "The Seed growing secretly" wrongly suggests that its lesson is the same as that of the Leaven; and the longer but somewhat similar story of the Wheat and the Tares, which replaces it in the First Gospel<sup>2</sup> and may well be an extended version based upon it, has there been given an apocalyptic and totally different significance. In St. Mark, it is manifest that the purpose of the parable is contained in the words "By its own

<sup>1</sup>Mark iv. 26-9.

<sup>2</sup>Matt. xiii. 24-30.

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nature the earth bears fruit": whatever men may do, sleeping or waking, the natural order is so constituted that growth takes place by its silent and mysterious energy. This purpose is emphasised by its position as the third of a series of stories which whether by historical reminiscence or by the skilful arrangement of the Evangelist form a continuous and logical sequence. The Sower cannot but suggest that man has only a passive responsibility for his response to the Word: if the soil of his life is shallow or stony or choked with weeds, that is surely a matter outside his control. The Lamp corrects this by insisting that man can himself place the light where it will be seen or hidden.<sup>1</sup> To complete the lesson there is need of a third story to assure us that we need neither accept a predetermined destiny without effort, nor fret ourselves with anxiety as if our own efforts were of sole importance: in the last resort the very nature of the world fosters growth: it is God's world, and His unresting purposes are being fulfilled in it: the Word is not something alien whose success depends upon chance or man's efforts: its environment is appropriate to it; it meets a situation congruous and fostering: evil may still befall it, but nature is, so to speak, on its side. The final parable of the series, the Mustard Seed, adds an assurance of the greatness of the growth.

The significance and simplicity of the lesson were overshadowed by the prevalent exaggeration of Apocalyptic in the outlook of the First Evangelist; and in later times the neglect of this aspect in the teaching and revelation of Jesus imposed a mistaken interpretation upon it: neither of these facts need surprise us: for they manifestly affected

<sup>1</sup>This lesson of responsibility is enforced by the warning that follows the parable.

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the whole presentation of the gospel. But the story is not the less on that account a clue to the character of the earliest *kerygma*, a survival of a fundamental element in the Christian religion. Such an element is emphasised not only by very many of the most certainly authentic of the sayings of Jesus but by His whole concept of the character of God: it is essential to any truly sacramental or incarnational theology. In the Synoptic tradition, pre-eminently in Q but also in the Marcan material, there is overwhelming evidence that Jesus endorsed and "ful-filled" all that the Old Testament had taught of the relation of the world to God as created, sustained and governed by Him; that He revealed alike in His teaching and by His death and resurrection the method by which, the cost at which, the evil in this world could be overcome. We must not allow the present stress upon divine transcendence and the fact of sin or upon eschatology and apocalyptic or upon the findings of Form-criticism to destroy for us the proportion of the faith, and blind us to the grandeur, the simplicity and consistency, of the Gospels.

For in the New Testament the recognition of the majesty and "otherness" of God is always compatible with His love for us and our dependence upon Him. If as against God man has no rights, that is a consequence less of man's creaturehood than of God's nature: love transcends the realm of claims and counterclaims. In St. Paul there are a few passages where images like that of the potter and the clay<sup>1</sup> suggest that mankind is inanimate and sub-personal: but in the Gospels and generally in the Epistles also, this survival from the Old Testament is lacking: grace is never an arbitrary gift bestowed upon a passive recipient but

<sup>1</sup>Rom. ix. 20-1, quoting from Isaiah xxix. 16; xlv. 9; and Jer. xviii. 6.

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always the gracious personal communion of the Father with His prodigals. If we cannot "make out and reckon on His ways, and bargain for His love," that is because He surpasses the measure of values as we assess them, not because, as some theologians would seem to maintain, He falls below them. If nature be totally depraved, then God is either not God or not love.

Similarly in regard to Apocalyptic, it may well be the case that the New Testament associates the fulfilment of our hope with the world to come, and gives no promise of it within the span of this age. But when scholars to-day assert that therefore God's Kingdom cannot come within history, they state a belief vastly different from, indeed opposite to, that of the Apostles. In the first century men believed passionately that the new age might begin at any moment—indeed that with the coming of Christ it had been already initiated and the end was an immediate possibility. We, with our vastly different view of the evolutionary process, do not and cannot with honesty believe that history will finish at any arbitrary moment. For men of the twentieth century to say that the Kingdom will not come within history is in effect to deny any real or urgent promise of its coming, and so to transform the Apostolic expectation of speedy regeneration into despair. When they said "the end may come to-morrow" they emphasised the nearness of the Kingdom; when we say "it cannot come within history" we emphasise its remoteness: enthusiasm gives way to defeatism.

So too when we are warned, and usefully warned, that a period of oral tradition preceded the writing of all the Gospels, that none of them is biographical as we understand the term, that all the material is influenced, selected and shaped by the needs of the Christian community,

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and that therefore the character of Jesus is seen as in a glass darkly, we must remember that these warnings so far as they are justified only enhance the significance of the elements in the records to which we have drawn attention. For it is precisely this insistence upon the worth of the natural order, precisely the fact that Jesus draws His lessons from the simplest processes of growth and human handiwork, that are least likely to be accretions or inventions. It is not surprising that the miraculous should be exaggerated: we can see the heightening of it at work, and may well suspect legendary embellishments: for the stress upon it seemed to enforce belief in the Master's divine status, and as we shall see from the Apocryphal Gospels and the history of doctrine the world was agog for thaumaturgy. Nor is it strange that apocalyptic and eschatological additions creep into the record; they had great evangelistic value and were speedily amplified as is proved by the First Gospel and the pseudepigraphic Apocalypses. Similarly assimilation to the Old Testament and the desire to find exact fulfilments of prophecy no doubt coloured the stories from a very early period: the First Gospel supplies the most familiar evidence of this in its treatment of Jonah<sup>1</sup> and of the two beasts at the Triumphal Entry.<sup>2</sup> The desire for edification both in general and in order to meet particular objections; the sense of drama influencing both the setting and the contents of the scenes; the conventions of the story-teller's art, exaggerated as this has been by those who try to fit every section of the Gospels into some arbitrary "form"; all these represent lines along which the original events may have been distorted. But there is nothing in the life of the first century or in the

<sup>1</sup>Matt. xii. 39, 40.

<sup>2</sup>Matt. xxi. 2-6.

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circumstances of the earliest Christians to suggest that they could conceivably have imagined or created the utterances and incidents in which Jesus discloses the beauty, order and meaning of the physical world. Their originality and simplicity are in sharp contrast with the whole trend of the time. That they have been preserved at all, is proof both of their authenticity and of the historical value of the documents that contain them.

In all these respects there is at present real danger that the solidity and consistency of the New Testament should be unjustly minimised. Analytical scholarship in disclosing the number and diversity of the sources ought rightly to increase our appreciation of the greatness of Him to whom they testify; for it is plain fact that however much they differ in details, as in their circumstances and outlook, not only are all the writers united both in ascribing to Jesus the origin of the "new way" and in exploring the vocabulary of religion for terms in which to describe His unique status, but each one of them has manifestly been influenced, indeed transformed, by Him and that in a fashion so similar as to give clear and in the main harmonious evidence as to His quality. We have already claimed that the change in St. Paul is in a direction identical with that which we should assume from a study of the Gospels. If this be so, if a man of marked individuality and cosmopolitan upbringing developes a character demonstrably consistent with the pictures of His Master preserved by oral tradition and embodied in the Synoptic records, that is in itself remarkable enough. It becomes inexplicable, when we remember that the result is inconsistent both with Jewish expectations and the *Zeitgeist* of the first century, except on the hypothesis that a historical

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person of outstanding originality and creative power had impressed Himself both upon the nameless disciples who gave form to the Gospel stories and upon the pupil of Gamaliel. This conviction is confirmed when we pass from them to the other documents of the New Testament.

It is unnecessary for our purpose to demonstrate at length the fidelity of these writings to the two-fold content of the *kerygma*. That God has acted in the death and resurrection of Jesus and that His action gives a new significance to nature and to history, is common to them all. That the most Jewish of them, the Epistle of St. James, should confine itself to ethical subjects, to stigmatising the inconsistencies between faith and practice, and to insisting upon the importance of conduct in the natural relationships which Christ has hallowed and the historical circumstances in which discipleship is to be expressed, is not surprising: when other writers were concerned with the cosmic effects of Christ's coming it is good to have this testimony to the importance of the Sermon on the Mount. But that the most Hellenistic, both in language and mentality, the author to the Hebrews, who in general foreshadows the characteristics which we associate with Alexandria, should have insisted as he does not only upon the continuity of Christ with the heroes and saints who preceded Him<sup>1</sup> but upon His natural growth, His temptations and suffering, and upon the light which these throw upon discipleship,<sup>2</sup> this is much more surprising: the great saying "It befitted Him for whom are all things and by whom are all things in bringing many sons unto glory to make the captain of their salvation perfect by sufferings"<sup>3</sup> strikes a note strange to the general outlook

<sup>1</sup>xi.-xii. 1.

<sup>2</sup>iv. 15-6; v. 7, 8.

<sup>3</sup>ii. 10.



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of Hellenists, and akin to Pauline and Jewish rather than to Greek theology.

In the Fourth Gospel and First Epistle of St. John it has indeed been frequently argued that we have a "speaking, acting Pauline Christ" and that the author's attitude towards history makes it wholly subservient to dogma. While the problem of the Gospel's historicity is still in dispute and while all would admit that it is a meditation and exposition rather than a record of facts, it would be rash to urge that the author or authors have as clear a grasp of the worth of nature as do the Synoptists. In any case I do not wish to restate the arguments which convince me<sup>1</sup> that the whole psychology of the book is that of a man looking back after a long interval upon scenes vividly remembered but selected and interpreted in the light of subsequent experience. Still less would I enter upon the debate as to whether this interpretation distorted the picture beyond saying that I should now admit a larger individual and defective element in the result. But even if the humanity of Jesus has been obscured and His explicit mastery of events and men and His own destiny been exaggerated (and these are natural consequences of lifelong discipleship when the "authority" of the Lord has repeatedly verified itself), there seems no justification for believing that there is any Gnostic tendency in the Gospel, or any conscious belittling of the value of nature and history. Indeed the insistence upon the human gestures, emotions and death of Jesus bear out the assertion of the Prologue that the Word became flesh and of the First Epistle that to deny this is Antichrist.

In our present inquiry it is less relevant to examine the

<sup>1</sup>Set out in my first book *What think ye of Christ?* and more fully in *Jesus and the Gospel of Love*.

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extent to which this claim is fulfilled in these writings than to recognise that the Johannine theology is in fact the finest and most satisfying attempt ever made to express the *kerygma* in terms of the character of God revealed by it. Here as elsewhere the work is indeed religious rather than theological, the fruit of spiritual insight rather than of argument or philosophy. But if the Johannine definitions of God as light and life and love belong to the language of the Church not of the University, they nevertheless express far more truly than any other formulation a theology compatible with belief in an incarnation and with a sacramental outlook upon nature and history. When, as we shall see, Christian thinkers of the Patristic period preferring the language of the Schools identified God with the Absolute, or when, as is so often the case to-day, He is defined in terms of the eternal values, beauty, truth and goodness, the consequence then and now is a sub-Christian valuation of personality and personal relationships, and a tendency to substitute an idealistic philosophy for an incarnational religion.

We cannot conclude this brief survey of the Apostolic literature without reference to the one book in the New Testament which may fairly be represented as inconsistent with our contention. The Revelation of St. John the divine stands apart from the others in its teaching hardly less than in its tone and temper. We may recognise the grandeur of some of the pictures in that fantastic and terrible gallery. We may, we must, make full allowance for the literary tradition of Apocalyptic and for the effects of persecution upon its author. We shall admire his intention to vindicate the righteousness and affirm the triumph of God, to encourage the heroic and warn the faint-hearted. But that he has grievously misunderstood

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the spirit of Christ and distorted the message of Christianity is not less evident than that his influence has been disastrous. If this verdict seems too severe, we may ponder upon the contrast between Him who preferred the lilies of the field to the raiment of Solomon, and him who would glorify the heavenly city in terms of pearls and precious stones; between Him who was the friend of sinners and forgave the woman taken in adultery and him who exults over their torment in fire and brimstone; between Him who said to the sons of Zebedee "ye know not what ye ask" and him whose whole book is an assurance of reward, of crowns and thrones. That the book does not deserve its place in the canon was the conviction of the most enlightened of the early Fathers. Many of us studying it in the light of the *kerygma* and of its own monstrous progeny will echo and emphasise their verdict.

But with this exception (and the exception is ominous) we get from the Apostolic age a consistent and well-attested picture of the Christian message and society. Here are men initiated into a mystery which was not legend but fact; reborn not into an eternal life which was at best a fantasy of the future but into an appreciation of the eternal significance of the here and now; living not by code and taboo, but freely and without fear, under constraint of no law but love; united in a community organic rather than organised, in which there was no room for exploitation or sentimentality, and in which a common loyalty and a common service integrate both the individuals and the society. Even if the picture of the infant Church in the Acts has its Ananias and Sapphira, even if St. Paul's vision of the body and its members is an ideal imperfectly attained, yet in the conviction that the world was redeemable, had indeed already been redeemed, by

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the historic and living Christ was contained a wholly new personal and corporate way of life.

The experience, which lies at the heart of this "Way" and is described as a passage "through death into life," is tolerably familiar to most mature Christians. When every earthly security is destroyed by the presence of death and man is confronted with the facts of his own transience and solitariness, or when as Aristotle realised he is purged of his pride "by pity and fear," the result is either despair or, beyond despair, the discovery that the loss of all else means the attainment of a new status, dependent not upon self-sufficiency but upon God. This status is characterised not only by a sense of detachment such as Mr. Aldous Huxley desires and seeks to achieve by a Buddhist asceticism,<sup>1</sup> but also and pre-eminently by an intense awareness of the beauty, order and worth of the world and of its folk, an intimate sensitiveness and sympathy, a joy which has known the worst that life can do and accepted it and which therefore is able to ride loose to the changes and chances of mortality. Such "dying to live" is of course recognised in some form or another in all the higher types of religion and ethics. The observance of the moral and ceremonial law in Judaism, the disciplined self-sufficiency of the Stoa, the asceticism and illumination of Isis or Mithra, the enthusiastic orgies of Dionysus or Cybele—these and a multitude of other practices aim at the same objective, the release of man from the tyranny of circumstance and the attainment of a sense of freedom and permanence. Jesus Himself in the oft-repeated Logion "Whoso loseth his life, findeth it" endorses the principle: by adding the words "for my sake" He indicates the means by which it

<sup>1</sup>The weakness of *Ends and Means* is that it aims at a Christian result by a Buddhist, or Stoic, technique.

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may be fulfilled, and in His beatitude upon the meek describes the result of its fulfilment. For in replacing the technique of renunciation or of ecstasy by personal devotion to God incarnate He secures that detachment from the world shall not issue in self-righteousness nor in moral anarchy but in the two qualities characteristic of Christendom, the untranslatable qualities of *agape* and *koinonia*. The Christian gospel with its proclamation of the reality and energy of God in Christ, and of the world as the scene and medium of His revelation, creates and makes attainable that right adjustment to nature and humanity, that truly personal level of living which these two terms describe.

It is probably true as Dr. Kittel and his colleagues in the *Wörterbuch* maintain that the common speech employed in the New Testament has everywhere received a baptism and subtle enhancement of meaning. Certainly both *agape* and *koinonia* illustrate this. The former<sup>1</sup> is indeed virtually an invention of the Christians; for though the verb is found in both classical and hellenistic Greek, and occurs freely in the Septuagint, the noun is rare even in the latter; and no other language has an adequate equivalent for it. It describes the sole motive that creates and sustains religion, the love of God for His creatures. It describes also the relationship to his fellows which a man experiences as a result of response to God's love—a relationship in which he no longer desires to dominate and exploit or to acquiesce and sentimentalise—when he can no longer say either "I love you and therefore wish to improve you" or

<sup>1</sup>It is unnecessary to enter into discussion of the thesis propounded by Nygren in *Agape and Eros* and its massive sequel. A searching criticism of it is contained in J. Burnaby, *Amor Dei*, especially pp. 15-21 and 307-14, where he shows that neither in the New Testament nor in the Christian religion is *agape* solely a "one-way" relationship.

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"I love you just as you are, faults and all"—when in fact he is able to appreciate and to enjoy. In it there is both a quickening of perception so that he sees himself and others in true proportion, and also a sympathy wholly free from self-consciousness, from patronage and subservience. *Koinonia* which at Pentecost received a new significance and which includes both communion and community—and perhaps Communism—is the result of *agape* when this animates a group, and mutual sympathy produces the organic unity described in the Acts as "being of one heart and of one mind" and by St. Paul in terms of the one body and one Spirit. The Church in its true nature should be such a society; and *koinonia* rather than test-creeds or hierarchies or cultus should be its differentiating characteristic.

It is probable that, when allowance has been made for the tendency to identify psychic phenomena with spiritual experience, it is this quality of *agape-koinonia* which Christians identified with the presence and work of the Holy Spirit. Certainly St. Paul's description of the fruit of the Spirit; and indeed the effects ascribed to Him, clarity of vision and insight, inspiration and guidance of spontaneous speech, encouragement in adversity and temptation as well as the integration and ordering of the corporate life, are compatible with such a conclusion; for all these are the outcome of such a death into life as we have been considering. That in the Apostolic Church belief in the Holy Spirit was general, vital and practical cannot be questioned: indeed to receive and be led by Him was the criterion of discipleship. If His presence was most easily discerned in such manifestations as speaking with tongues, St. Paul at least was plainly aware of their relatively superficial character, insisted that the more excellent way

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was not in any of the "gifts" but in *agape*, and set the *koinonia* of the Holy Spirit on a level with the gracious gift of Christ and the love of God. Indeed the New Testament as a whole bears witness both explicitly in a multitude of references and implicitly by its whole quality and influence to the fact that as a result of the gospel a new way of life, so new as to be rightly called a re-birth, was inaugurated; that this way was clearly defined by its characteristic effects both individual and corporate; that these effects were recognised as and ascribed to the operation of the Holy Spirit.

Such faith in the Holy Spirit inevitably involves and corroborates the valuation of nature and history which we find in the *kerygma*. If in this world there is an indwelling of the Godhead, if God Himself is operative not only in the incarnate Son of Man but through His Spirit in the whole process and struggles of its history, then God can no longer be only the "wholly other" nor His creation be wholly depraved. Indeed for the Christian the hope of Israel, of its prophets and psalmists, had been fully accomplished: he saw the earth, proleptically but vividly, as filled with the glory of God, and lived in the splendour of that vision. As the vision faded, as nature and history were defamed, so the experience of *agape* and *koinonia* was forgotten, and belief in the Holy Spirit became formal, vague and almost meaningless. It is our business to inquire how this tragic change came to pass.

Before doing so it will be well to close this chapter by insisting upon the importance for religion of this matter of its attitude towards the world. •Dr. Oman's massive and brilliant treatment of this subject, in his great book *The Natural and Supernatural*, finds in this attitude a criterion by which all religions can be classified and appraised. His

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evidence for the correlation not only of individual and racial circumstances, wealth and poverty, ease or difficulty in getting a livelihood, with the renunciation or acceptance of the natural order, but of the verdict upon nature with the whole religious outlook is singularly impressive both in its range and in its unanimity. When he summarises his thesis in the memorable if somewhat obscure phrase "reconciliation to the evanescent is revelation of the eternal, and revelation of the eternal is a higher reconciliation to the evanescent"<sup>1</sup> few who have followed his argument will question the justice of his conclusion. He has certainly established the importance of testing the comparative merits of different theologies by reference to their estimate of nature, and has proved that for prophetic Judaism and for Christianity the conviction that the world is redeemable is of primary significance. Those who may be inclined to suppose that a right appreciation of nature and history are of little consequence to religion, or to expect that Christianity can maintain the power of its earliest days while acquiescing in the degradation of their faith in this respect should study Dr. Oman's work—and change their minds.

<sup>1</sup>l.c., p. 470.



### III

## THE RENUNCIATION OF NATURE

IT is commonly argued that when we pass from the study of the Apostolic age to that of its successor, the spiritual, moral and intellectual level of the records drops at once and unmistakably. The passion and imaginative insight, the originality and creativity, the vigour and mastery which make the New Testament literature immortal disappear; we plunge into an age of the commonplace and the second-hand, into writings either fantastic or dull or both, into the records of men too small to deal with their inheritance. At first sight such an impression is inevitable. The Apocryphal Gospels, Acts and Apocalypses with hardly any exception are poor stuff, vulgar in their miracle-mongering, extravagant in their efforts to prove a case, grotesque in their handling of history. Indeed their chief value is as a foil to the canonical Scriptures: they show us what popular fancy expected and popular imagination supplied, and make nonsense of the criticism which would deny the historicity of Jesus or impugn the substantial authenticity of the New Testament. The more reputable literature is hardly less uninspiring. The Shepherd of Hermas, though it has a certain charm of naïve piety and moral earnestness, would be out of place in the Canon. The Epistle of Barnabas foreshadows the weakest element in Alexandrian theology, its extravagantly allegorical exegesis. The First Epistle of

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Clement is a monument of mediocrity: one wonders how anyone who knew St. Paul's letter to the Corinthians could produce so dull a comment upon it. The Second is justly described as "neither an Epistle nor by Clement, but a sermon—and a bad sermon at that." The *Didache*, if early and genuine, is of high importance for the historian; but the "Two Ways" is a pedestrian version of the Sermon on the Mount and the later sections apart from the Eucharistic prayer and the picture of a simple-minded Christian society give an unedifying account of the life of the Church. Even Ignatius despite his sincerity and courage is an unattractive figure, narrow to the verge of fanaticism and morbid in his zest for death: it is difficult not to feel the contrast between him and earlier martyrs, and even a measure of sympathy for the imperial authorities who had to deal with him.

That is a first impression; and it leaves us ready to believe that the fading of the Apocalyptic hope had cut the nerve-cords of Christian vitality and to wonder how these uninspired groups of small folk won their way to world-wide recognition. There was unquestionably a falling away. When Apostolic leadership was no longer available, when the little communities were left to work out their own salvation in face of the general hostility of the Empire and the diverse problems of their local situations, there followed a period of experiment, of unrecorded lapses and heroisms, a period in which total disintegration was a real danger and loss of initiative and grip was inevitable. In every movement the passage from the founders and pioneers to their successors is critical: forces of disruption hitherto restrained advocate their own programmes in the name of progress; forces of conservatism look back instead of forward, and obstruct

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all change by appeals to the past. Such tendencies are obvious in the Church of the Sub-apostolic age; and if we judge it solely by its literary remains, there might seem to be nothing else in it.

Before accepting such a conclusion we must remember that the writings that have survived only represent a fragment and that they were selected by a process little calculated to preserve for us a true or adequate estimate of the period. Works that claimed Apostolic authorship, even if their claim was absurd, gained a fictitious value in uncritical ages: works that bore directly upon matters subsequently controversial, which could be quoted in the interests of later orthodoxy, were likely to endure: works which became sacred in the sects were treasured in particular quarters and if they were suppressed when their votaries disappeared might yet be recoverable in modern times. But in the main the books which deal with what we want to know, the life and faith of ordinary Christians in the early days, were not valued by later ages and have perished beyond recall. Eusebius who did priceless service by his lavish use of exact quotations and who was a man of great learning and wide sympathies, has shown how much precious material has been lost and how often a scholar can fail to discriminate between what is trivial and what is permanent in value. It must not be forgotten that our picture of the second century is a mosaic in which the available pieces are few and selected for reasons other than those which the modern historian would have chosen.

In any case our first impression is demonstrably unjust. Whether or no we correct it by insisting that some at least of the canonical writings belong to this period—and if it produced the Johannine literature it can hardly be

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condemned as mediocre—the achievements of Christendom in the century that followed the fall of Jerusalem forbid us to judge it in terms of disparagement. To have carried the gospel from the Euphrates to the Atlantic, to have won converts from the court of Domitian, to have transplanted the Church from its nursery in Palestine and while preserving its Jewish origin and Old Testament heritage to have given it world-wide viability, to have withstood persecution and excavated and inscribed the catacombs—this is testimony to the maintenance of its early promise almost unimpaired. Its literature may be disappointing, its power is manifest and marvellous. If we reconsider our verdict in the light of its evangelistic accomplishments, we shall find even in *Hermas* and still more in the letter to *Diognetus* signs of the authentic experience which the *kerygma* inaugurated—indeed in the *Ad Diognetum* a description of it which is deservedly classic: nowhere is the paradox and romance of living eternally in the world of time more vividly and simply stated.

Yet if we may not ascribe to the decadence of the diadochi the degrading of the Apostolic attitude towards nature and history, we must not be blind to the fact that already symptoms of change are discernible. As we have insisted these arise out of the effort to fulfil Christ's command and preach the gospel to all nations, out of the wish, indeed the necessity, to commend it by emphasising points of contact, out of the inability of converts to divest themselves entirely of individual and racial preconceptions. If St. Paul never quite outgrew the limitations of Saul of Tarsus, it is not surprising that Orientals and Greeks and Latins, baptised into Christ, should still have shown traces of their birth and social heritage or

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that communities mainly consisting of members of a particular race should develop appropriate and distinctive types of Christian life. Indeed it is remarkable not that this should have occurred but that the unity of Christendom was not fatally damaged and the Church split up into a number of local and peculiar sects. That certain distortions originally due to particular groups should have in time been taken up into catholic tradition was perhaps unavoidable, though in most cases it is due to special circumstances which gave the distortion a general influence.

To analyse and expound the process systematically is not easy without some artificiality of arrangement and some overlapping of content. For the expansion of the Church was rapid and universal: the impulse which refused to complete the evangelising of the Jews before proceeding to Antioch, Ephesus, Corinth, Rome set Christians at work among peoples of varied colour and tradition simultaneously. If we assert that the ascetic rejection of nature was the earliest lapse, and associate this with the influence of Oriental and dualistic converts and with the Gnostic movements: if we point next to the rejection of history and assign it to Hellenistic influence and the Platonism of Alexandria; and if finally we draw attention to the Latin passion for law and constitution-making, and blame this for stereotyping the distortions as part of the order of a Church modelled upon the Empire; in each case it must be remembered that the processes are only roughly consecutive, that their development is to some extent simultaneous and interlocked, and that a schematic treatment here as always may do less than justice to the actual course of events. Since our concern is rather to insist upon the extent to which these exaggerations have des-

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troyed the proportion and impaired the vitality of Christianity, a detailed historical exposition of the theme would be out of place. The division suggested will bring out the facts clearly and account for them sufficiently for our purpose. To deal with them more fully would be to write a history of the first five centuries of Christendom. We will begin therefore with Gnosticism and the influence of its characteristic dualism in promoting a puritan outlook upon the physical universe, a denial of the worth of nature, and an insistence upon its total depravity.

Gnosticism is of course rather a movement than a heresy, indeed rather a tendency than a movement. The term draws attention to the claim to special knowledge without necessarily defining in what that knowledge consisted. It is thus used to cover a multitude of teachers from Cerinthus to Marcion who have in fact very little in common, and was freely adopted by Clement of Alexandria and his school to describe their substantially orthodox philosophy. The Gnostics were the spiritual intelligentsia, who professed to hold an esoteric doctrine which the ordinary man could not be expected to understand. Nevertheless in early Christian history Gnosticism has a characteristic outlook, and this consists in rejecting the physical realm as evil. How far they were directly influenced by Zoroastrianism and Eastern beliefs is a matter for research: probably few of them before the Manichæans depended consciously upon such sources. But the rigid dualism of Ormuzd and Ahriman represents a deep-seated tendency in human nature, and its basic belief that the good life is the life of pure spirit, that the function of religion is emancipation from the flesh, and that the practice of strict ascetism or in rare instances of a cal-

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culated and contemptuous debauchery was the way of salvation had become widely accepted in the pre-Christian world. That Christianity should have assumed a world-renouncing form in the churches of the Euphrates valley,<sup>1</sup> and that a number of different Gnostic teachers should have influenced and distracted the Christianity of Syria and Egypt was only to be expected.

Gnosticism, as we have seen, is traceable in the New Testament; for the connection between the heresies condemned at Colossæ, in the Pastorals and in the First Epistle of St. John and the later and multitudinous Gnostic sects is hardly obscure. In Essenism and indeed in orthodox Judaism itself Persian influence had fostered a conviction that the earth was corrupt, material existence a prison, and the mortification of the flesh synonymous with spiritual progress. That even Hellenism for all its passionate sense of beauty was infected by the asceticism of the East is proof of the power of such dualism.

That the Gnostics were the first theologians, that their rejection of the physical life and nature of Christ, their "endless genealogies" explaining the entanglement of good in the evil of matter, and their claims to superior knowledge and purer morals were answered by Irenæus and rejected by the Church, and that their condemnation was due rather to the appeal to authority than to an adequate answering of their arguments, these are familiar facts. Gnosticism in its avowed sectaries was condemned. Its influence was none the less considerable, both upon doctrine and upon ethics. Of its effects in giving an intellectualist bias to Christianity we shall speak later: in taking over the title of Gnostic, Clement of Alexandria took

<sup>1</sup>cf. Burkitt, *Early Eastern Christianity*, pp. 118-54.

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over something of their claim to esoteric knowledge. But it is in the moral sphere that they were most dangerous; for here the boast of a higher standard was concerned with matters in which the ordinary man is vitally concerned. We are all fretted by the allure of the senses and lend a ready ear when "hypocrites austere talk of purity and place and innocence, Defaming as impure what God declares Pure, and commands to some leaves free to all." A competition in renunciation is easy to begin and hard to relinquish: "the pomps and vanities of this sinful world" may readily be extended to include the whole order of nature.

It is likely that the combined influence of Old Testament scriptures and of Hellenism would have succeeded in preserving the Christian valuation of nature from serious distortion if it had not been for the temperament and gifts of Tertullian; and even he when he discredited himself by joining the Montanists might have followed his fellow-sectaries into oblivion if the circumstances of the time had not fostered some of the most distorted elements in his teaching. His brilliance of style (hardly even Tacitus exploits the brevity and pungency of the Latin language with greater skill), his passion in defence and invective (particularly the latter) and his genius in devising formulæ (he was not alone in thinking that he had solved a problem when he had found a formula), even these might not have saved him if his time had not matched his powers.

Indeed it is to the circumstances of the period which promoted a revolt against the natural order more than to the Gnostics or Tertullian that we would draw attention: they are less well known and almost certainly very much more powerful in their effects.



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The first of these was occasioned by the boredom of the age. No one reading the literature of the Augustan period can fail to recognise in all its achievements a note of weariness and satiety that is not far from spiritual starvation. Behind its laughter and its tears, its eulogising of the past and its satirising of the present, lies the conviction that life at its best is dull and depressing. Luxury had enervated the aristocracy—they had gained the world and lost their souls in doing so: slavery and poverty, "bread and the games," had crushed the vitality of the masses. The twilight of the gods, for which Lucretius had striven with the fervour of a crusader, had closed in upon the world: and the twilight of the gods means candlelight and artificiality for men. That is why the literature so admired in the eighteenth century deserves its modern condemnation: it is clever, polished, sonorous, dignified, urbane, but "like a tale of little meaning though the words are strong" it has neither originality nor passion; and it mirrors not unfaithfully the quality of its time.

Such ennui was of course opportune for the preachers of the gospel: they came to a world hungry for a message of hope. But its natural effect was to sharpen the appetite for marvel. When men cease to find nature and the common things of life interesting, they develop a craving for the abnormal, for something to whet the jaded appetite of the epicure and relieve the monotony of the daily round for the drudge. Scepticism is always a breeding-ground of superstition; and of the religion of the Græco-Roman world little remained but its belief in demons and dreams, prodigies and portents, the evil eye and the lucky star.

How deeply the craze for miracle had permeated all

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classes of society is obvious from a mass of evidence; Suetonius, most superstitious of chroniclers and Tacitus, critical as is his general outlook, think it fit to record a multitude of prodigies,<sup>1</sup> a pig with a hawk's talons or a swarm of bees upon the Capitol;<sup>2</sup> and the repeated tale of the expulsion of soothsayers and *mathe-matici* from Rome, if it shows that the Empire was aware of the evil, shows also how futile were the efforts to stem it. Every great household had its resident magician: from lecture-room to street-corner "Chaldæans" and "Egyptians," astrologers, necromancers and oracle-mongers received an eager hearing: the traffic in amulets and philtres, spells and omens, was brisk, lucrative and universal. Simon the Mage, Elymas the sorcerer, the ventriloquist at Philippi, the professors of the black art at Ephesus, these familiar figures of the New Testament were typical and only too numerous.

The effect of this obsession was to foster a belief not only in the evidential value of miracle but in the identification of religion with the crudest supernaturalism. It is impossible to deny its influence even upon the New Testament: the heightening of the miraculous element in the later Gospels, the intrusion of stories whose chief purpose is to excite wonder, the importance attaching to psychic and pathological phenomena, the exaggeration of the argument from prophecy in apologetic—these and other symptoms reveal that the pressure of the popular demand was not without its influence. But it is in the second century that superstition begins to distort the faith. Indeed a comparison between the extravagancies of its writings and the sobriety and restraint of the New Testament is, as we

<sup>1</sup>cf., e.g., *Octavian*, 93; and *Annals*, XII, 43; XV, 47, etc.

<sup>2</sup>*Annals*, XII, 64.

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have already argued, no small proof of the substantial historicity of the Canon. The multiplication of legends and of thaumaturgy, the claim of Irenæus that miracles are the prerogative of the orthodox,<sup>1</sup> the appeals to exorcism and to the magic power of the name of Jesus,<sup>2</sup> the interminable arguments of Justin to attest detailed fulfilments of Old Testament predictions, the readiness to turn the Scriptures into a collection of oracles and cryptograms<sup>3</sup>—here are examples of the concessions to public opinion forced upon the Church by its desire to commend the gospel. No wonder that the teaching of Jesus as to the worth of nature, and His use of parable and sacrament were forgotten: for when the supernatural is exaggerated the natural is despised. No wonder, at least for those who believe that a right valuation of nature is a necessary condition for the manifestation of the supernatural, that as the Fathers reluctantly confess the dynamic power of the gospel grew weak and the age of miracles had to be declared at an end. But the damage was done: the *kerygma* was distorted: Christianity was given a subtle twist towards denying the worth of nature and history. That until very recently two authenticated miracles have been a necessary qualification for official sainthood shows how persistent has been the distortion.

A second element in the life of the period which challenged the attention of the Church and ultimately produced a similar result was the licentiousness of its sexual morality. It is unnecessary here to discuss the extent of corruption or to examine how far the traditional pictures

<sup>1</sup>*Adv. Haer.* II, 31, 2 and 32, 4 and 5.

<sup>2</sup>e.g., Tertullian *Apol.* 23 and Origen, *C. Cels.* I, 6 and 25.

<sup>3</sup>e.g., the citation of Numbers xxiii, 19, for the Crucifixion; Ps. iii, 5, the Burial; Exod. xix, 11, the Resurrection by Ps-Cyprian *Testim. adv. Judæos.*

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of it are justified. No doubt it is unfair to generalise from the poems of Ovid, or the orgies of Nero, or the diatribes of Juvenal.<sup>1</sup> No doubt there were many homes, many sections of society, in which natural relationships were maintained. No doubt then as now the very rich and the very poor were most deeply infected. But it is impossible to ascribe a high moral tone to an age which produced the *Satyricon* of Petronius (possibly the only book ever written that contains no spark of sexual decency or dignity) in which, as Martial declares, popularity was measured by obscenity and his epigrams were recited in public to a mixed audience, and in which a small provincial town like Pompeii can furnish the closed room in the Naples Museum and confront its visitors with the likeness of Priapus. There is a streak of puritanism in St. Paul that is foreign to the mind of his Master, but his indictment of the degradation and perversions of pagan society in the first chapter of the Epistle to the Romans is borne out by a mass of evidence. The world badly needed the antiseptic influence of Christianity.

The first response of the Church to this challenge was splendid: it was both wholesome and vigorous, and relied rather upon example than upon precept. It is not fair to ascribe the improved status of womanhood or the interest in children solely to Christianity; for in both directions there had been a change during the two centuries before Christ. But it remains true that the reverence for woman as the spiritual equal of man was a new thing: the Jews denied it; Mithraism was for men only and the mysteries generally gave them the chief rank<sup>2</sup>—women having their

<sup>1</sup>cf. Hobhouse, *Morals in Evolution*, pp. 210-2.

<sup>2</sup>So Cumont, *Mysteries of Mithra*, pp. 173-4.

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own cult in the worship of Isis; Græco-Roman paganism reserved most of its ceremonies for one sex or the other. So too with children, Jesus had given a new significance to them when He welcomed them and set a child in the midst; for His disciples the exposure of the unwanted which was still regarded as legitimate outside the Church was inconceivable; abortion and infanticide were condemned; a genuine love of children began to show itself not as an exception, but in general.

There were indeed localities and groups in which Christianity almost from the first took an ascetic and exaggerated form. In the Euphrates valley as we have already seen Zoroastrian influence produced a dualism of matter and spirit; and this inevitably led to a defamation of wedlock and a horror of the flesh. The far Eastern churches<sup>1</sup> like the Gnosticism which they fostered tended to make celibacy a condition of baptism, to treat the married as spiritually defiled, to condemn second marriages as adulterous, and to regard woman as at best the inferior and at worst the temptress of man. Dualism in general and Zoroastrianism in particular are masculine in their appeal: man, the warrior and wanderer, fretted by the struggle against his passions and ashamed of his surrender to them, identifies escape from their dominion with religion, and can only regard woman, the mother and home-maker, as the beloved enemy, the seducer of his soul: if she can be "saved by her child-bearing"<sup>2</sup> yet she must remember her subjection and be kept in her proper and lower estate. The author or editor of the Pastoral Epistles had a large following in the Eastern Churches.

<sup>1</sup>cf. Burkitt, *Early Eastern Christianity*.

<sup>2</sup>1 Tim. ii. 15.

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Of this outlook a typical picture is given in the apocryphal *Acts of John*,<sup>1</sup> a document written not later than the middle of the second century and as is obvious from its effect upon other apocryphal Acts of widespread influence. The story of Andronicus and Drusiana, the diatribe against marriage preserved in the so-called Letter of Titus, and John's own last prayer, are violently Encratite, and represent the position which Tatian the Apologist also adopted. In the Marcionite churches and in Montanism this attitude was universal; and these with the more definitely Gnostic sects must have represented in the days of Irenæus a considerable proportion of the faithful. Whatever we may think of the theological arguments by which such sects were repudiated, the value of the work of churchmen like Polycarp or even Callistus as well as Irenæus himself in refusing to let the Church be rushed into asceticism of this kind is wholly praiseworthy. It was Irenæus's insistence upon the unique authority of the four Gospels and his appeals to the Apostolic writings that prevented the apocryphal literature from winning acceptance: if he established the tradition, at least he gave a norm to the Church.

The fullest evidence of the attitude towards sex of these defenders of the faith is to be found in the writings of Clement of Alexandria. Clement for all his massive and varied learning and his profound but rather nebulous philosophy, is deeply and constantly concerned with moral problems: indeed he makes havoc of the order and sequence of his *Pædagogus* by plunging out of speculations about the nature of the Logos into advice as to behaviour in the baths or on the use of cosmetics. In handling questions of conduct he displays a robust and

<sup>1</sup>In James *The Apocryphal N.T.*, pp. 228-70.

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healthy common sense, speaking with complete frankness ("why should I hesitate to name what God was not ashamed to make?"<sup>1</sup>) but with a shrewd knowledge of human nature, a real sympathy with human weakness, and a clear perception both of the obligations of discipleship and of the worth and dignity of natural functions and relationships. He recognises and values man's physical state, accepts marriage and parenthood as elements in a full and good life, insists that they are to be undertaken as in God's presence and with the reverence that His presence entails, and gives advice in some detail as to the blessings and temptations that they involve.<sup>2</sup> He writes of them without any sign of prudishness or of suggestiveness; and if his words are sensible rather than inspiring, practically wise rather than spiritually profound, they reveal a candid and wholesome appreciation of the importance and the character of the subject.<sup>3</sup> At least he treats men and women as human beings and children of God, not as angels or fallen angels, beasts or satyrs. If in Clement's day Christians are beginning to settle down in the world<sup>4</sup> and lose something of the adventurousness and heroic virtue of the Apostolic age, his advice to them is fully in keeping with the Apostolic message and shows no sign of serious distortion.

It is in his contemporary Tertullian that the first lapse is seen. We must make allowances in judging him for the moral corruption of Carthage with its Phoenician tradition and its mixed population, for his own puritanical reaction against it, and for the streak of sadism that is apparent in

<sup>1</sup>*Paedag.* II, 6 and 10.

<sup>2</sup>*Strom.* II, 23. He even challenges St. Paul's verdict in 1 Cor. vii, 32-4, cf. *Strom.* III, 12.

<sup>3</sup>For a fuller account cf. Tollinton, *Clement of Alexandria*, I, pp. 239-302.

<sup>4</sup>As is shown, e.g., in the *Quis dives*.

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all his writings; and we may suspect on good evidence that he was strongly sexual and unhappily married. But whatever excuses can be made for him, his handling of the subject is both repulsive in itself and disastrous in its influence. Marriage is essentially the same as fornication<sup>1</sup>—at best a dirty and lascivious business with which the Christian ought not to be entangled: it is good to know that there will be none of it in heaven.<sup>2</sup> Second marriages are a licensed adultery. Any forgiveness of sexual offenders is an incitement to immorality. The virgin state is the hall-mark and crown of virtue. Woman is a snare of the devil, and sex a proof of the world's corruption. Here as elsewhere the advocate of purity is almost as obscene as the lust which he castigates.

It would be wholly unjust to regard Tertullian as typical of his time, or to exaggerate as has too often been done the extent to which his puritanism infected the Church. But we all know that those whose lives are devoted to dealing with problems of sex are in danger of becoming obsessed, and that methods of wholesale repression succeed only in producing a whited sepulchre. The Church could not have evaded the task. It succeeded remarkably in cleaning public life, in banishing open incentives to vice, in overthrowing the almost universal practice of pæderasty and sexual perversions, and in making it possible for children to grow up in a healthy environment. There is abundant evidence to show how great was the achievement of Christianity in its crusade.

But its success was not gained without cost. The terrible picture in Anatole France's *Thais* is not true of the majority even of professed ascetics: but if it represents

<sup>1</sup>*De Exhort. Castit.*, 9

<sup>2</sup>*Ad Uxor.*, I, 3.



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rare and extreme cases of obsession, there can be no doubt that a horror of the flesh, a conviction that sex was the root of all evil, a fantastic exaggeration of the spiritual value of celibacy, crept into the general mind of Christendom. In the third century and especially in Methodius, Arnobius and Lactantius there is a morbid insistence upon physical virginity and a tendency to gloat upon the sexuality of heathendom that is wholly false to the example of Jesus and the quality of Apostolic discipleship. If the flight of the hermits to the desert was largely due to disgust at the secularising of the Church and to the pursuit of heroic virtue, the records of the temptations and the teaching of the anchorites show that the fretting of inhibited desires and the wish to fly from the allurements of the senses were chiefly responsible for turning Christianity into a way of individual salvation which was in fact a way not of redemption but of escape.

In the fifth century it is only necessary to refer to the two greatest Latin saints, Jerome and Augustine, to see how the spirit of Tertullian had prevailed. Jerome, imperilling his reputation for scholarship in his desire to secure the virginity of St. Joseph by the theory that the brethren of Jesus were only cousins,<sup>1</sup> and declaring that Demetrius's refusal to marry has fully compensated for the sack of Rome by the Goths<sup>2</sup>, reveals how deeply his nature had been warped by sex-obsession and his own struggles for chastity<sup>3</sup>. It is hardly unfair to say that he never handles the subject of sex without degrading it—and that he handles it on every possible occasion. Augustine is an even more conclusive illustration of the extent

<sup>1</sup>*Contra Helvidium*.

<sup>2</sup>*Ep.* 130.

<sup>3</sup>*cf. Ep.* 22, 7 and 30.

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to which a horror of the flesh had become an inescapable element in the Christian tradition. No man had a deeper insight into the true motive and character of the religious life: no man can speak more plainly of the revelation of God in nature or of the splendour of God's love: no man was more sensitive to human relationships or at his best could be more generous. Yet in his attitude towards sex he is never quite free from signs of obsession; and this cannot be dismissed as an unimportant element in his thought. It is not for nothing that he was attracted to Manichæism or accepted the  $\sigma\omega\mu\alpha$   $\sigma\eta\mu\alpha$ <sup>1</sup> of the Neo-Platonists or repudiated the mother of his son before his conversion. Sexual corruption is, even in his best period, the chief consequence of the Fall;<sup>2</sup> and he cannot resist copying from Tertullian<sup>3</sup> the dirty gibes at the deities by which heathendom sought to hallow wedlock.<sup>4</sup> Later though he strives to distinguish concupiscence from sin he does not succeed in maintaining the distinction, and accepts the belief that sex is the instrument by which the effects of the Fall are transmitted and that children are literally born in sin.<sup>5</sup> No doubt the ruthless logic of Julian forced him into extremes: but the view that mankind is a mass of perdition, that the virtues of the pagan are sinful, and that unbaptised infants are justly damned<sup>6</sup> is only the necessary consequences of a dualism which underlies all his work. If the most famous saints of the period can take this attitude, it is not surprising that the

<sup>1</sup>cf. Plato, *Gorg.*, 493a, "the body is our tomb."

<sup>2</sup>*De Civ. Dei*, XIV, 16-26.

<sup>3</sup>*Ad Nationes*, II.

<sup>4</sup>*De Civ. Dei*, V., 9.

<sup>5</sup>*De Nupt. et Concup.*, 15, and the writings against Julian; cf. Harnack *H.D.*, V, pp. 210-5.

<sup>6</sup>*Enchir.*, 103, *mitissima poena*—here as elsewhere his heart is greater than his logic.

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Church rejected the order of nature as under the dominion of Satan.

For it is obvious alike from the strength of the sex-instinct and from the intimacy of its function that morbidity here will have inevitable and far-reaching effects. The attitude of the individual or the society towards sex determines more certainly than any other influence the attitude towards the whole physical order. If, as Unwin's recent research<sup>1</sup> has shown, discipline in sexual life is closely correlated with advance in civilisation, it is equally demonstrable that mere repression is almost as disastrous as unbridled license: fear and disgust, hardly less than sensuality, produce a maladjustment which destroys the possibility of healthy living. For the Christian whose belief in the Incarnation carries with it a belief in the sanctity and sacramental value of the body, a horror of sex is, and should be recognised as, an apostasy. It is not surprising that a century which denounced marriage should have condemned the world as totally corrupt, or that with this condemnation it should have found the Incarnation not merely a paradox but a stumbling-block. It is not an accident that the monks of Nitria should have been the "storm-troops" of Monophysitism: if wedlock and childbirth are contemned, any real belief in the Son of Man becomes impossible: puritan ethics succeeded where Gnostic theology had failed: the *kerygma* was again distorted.

A third factor in the environment of the early Church operated in a similar direction—the pressure of persecution.

Of the value of persecution in keeping the standard of

<sup>1</sup>*Sex and Culture*: his evidence from primitive peoples seems conclusive but the application of it to the history of civilisation is oversimplified.

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discipleship high, in freeing Christians from reliance upon worldly security, in giving occasion to heroic fortitude, and in revealing the strength and joy of the gospel there is little need to speak. When the acceptance of Christ might at any moment involve denunciation to the authorities and a cruel and ignominious death, the Church was not likely to attract the half-hearted. Its members might be few, but at least they had counted the cost, and the cost was heavy. We have only to consider the speed with which secularism invaded Christendom after the Edict of Milan to realise how powerful a safeguard against it was provided by the previous hostility of the Empire. "Adversity" in Bacon's truism "doth best discover virtue." When men are compelled to live dangerously and can find no safety in their material environment, they learn to ride loose to life; and this is the secret of romance and adventure, and the occasion for a testing of the reality and resources of God. "If I go down to hell, thou art there also" records an experience essential to mature discipleship. When the Church could supply evidence of its power over torture and death such as is gloriously recorded in the letter of the churches of Lyons and Vienne or the Acts of Perpetua and Felicitas, it inevitably overcame the world. We do well to hold in honour those whose sufferings were transformed by their faith into occasions of thanksgiving. The blood of the martyrs was an argument to which the pagan could not refuse attention: for here was courage of a kind which neither soldiers nor Stoics could equal. When finally persecution was met in a spirit of joy, when as the catacombs testify men and women went to their deaths as to a festival, the world could not long continue to smite them. Here was an exaltation of spirit, which amazed and con-

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victed the persecutors. Those who so could die, these slave-girls and striplings, had a secret which all mankind would learn. If the last enemy is death, they had triumphed over him, and stripped life of all its terrors. To kill them was useless—and shameful: if the alternative was to accept their gospel, that was surely worth considering. That the Christian attitude in face of persecution was the most powerful instrument in evangelism can hardly be questioned.

But persecution, especially in its later forms, had effects which were less salutary. Already, as we have seen, in the Apocalypse there is evidence of an insistence upon rewards and punishments, a thirst for revenge, a transfer of interest from the here to the hereafter, and a consequent belittling of earth in the interests of heaven or hell. We have already argued that this is out of keeping with the teaching of Jesus, the witness of the Apostles and the experience of the Apostolic Church. It is, in fact, not much in evidence in the records of the earlier martyrs, and is singularly absent from the catacombs. If death were the gate of life and the day of execution a birthday, yet the spirit which inspired the sufferers is that of the *Ad Diognetum*, the spirit which accepts and enjoys the earth precisely because it sees it in the light of the eternal, the spirit which is never merely other-worldly but sees things present and things to come as equally within the loving sovereignty of God.

Yet too soon the emphasis upon the hereafter began to involve a disparagement of earthly life and to transfer the fulfilment of God's will and even the experience of his presence from this world to the next. In spite of the labours of the great Greek theologians to expound creation in terms of an evolutionary and educative process and to

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insist therefore upon the value of nature and the danger of Millenarian and Apocalyptic ideas, the popular interest in heaven and hell encouraged by the desire to honour the martyrs and vindicate the justice of God against their judges began to regard the world as at best a place of probation and at worst a means for securing merit or evading punishment. The appeal of the love of God and the brethren is replaced by motives of blatant selfishness: and men are exhorted to do good in order to establish a claim for reward; to resist evil lest it involve an eternity of torment; to be loyal to the Church as a prudent investment; to seek martyrdom as a short cut to forgiveness and bliss. It is small wonder that detailed descriptions of the future life begin to fill the writings and sermons of churchmen. Jesus and His Apostles had been singularly reticent about the next world and give little encouragement to those who would map out its topography or draw pictures of its joys and terrors. Their reticence was followed by their successors for whom it was enough that in life or death they would be with the Lord. But before the middle of the second century the demand for more concrete information had its effect; and from a variety of sources, ranging from Jewish Apocalyptic to Zoroastrianism and perhaps to Homer and Virgil, material was collected to supply it. Indeed the speed with which other-worldliness contaminated the gospel is only intelligible when we remember the precariousness of life in an outlawed society and the emotional strain which indignation and pity impose upon the spectators of persecution.<sup>1</sup>

The most important, and most horrible, of these

<sup>1</sup>The Cappadocian Fathers are probably the last to hold a universalist doctrine. For a catena of passages bearing on this subject cf. Pusey, *What is of Faith as to Everlasting Punishment*, pp. 173-287.

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pictures of the hereafter is the Apocalypse of St. Peter,<sup>1</sup> a book mentioned in the Muratorian Fragment "although some will not have it read in the church," quoted apparently as Scripture by Clement of Alexandria, and stated by Sozomen to be still read on "the day of Preparation"<sup>2</sup> in some churches of Palestine. It has slight points of contact with the Second Epistle of St. Peter—the stress upon the transfiguration and the destruction of the world by fire<sup>3</sup>—and was largely used by the fifth century author of the Apocalypse of St. Paul.<sup>4</sup> After narrating how at the last day hell shall be opened and all the dead gathered together with their bodies, and how then the world will be consumed, it tells in great detail of the punishments that await the various classes of evil-doers. Flames and fiery mire, lakes of fire and evil spirits—all the properties of the Inferno are described here: apostates, murderers, persecutors, blasphemers, false witnesses, those who trusted in riches and those who demanded usury, idol-makers and various sexual offenders are the victims. Then paradise bright with unfading flowers and fragrant with perfume is briefly described, and a hint is given that ultimately God will have pity and open His kingdom to all—the larger hope was not heretical till three centuries later.

The book is plainly an expansion of Revelation XX, 10-15, and of the doom pronounced in Jude and amplified in II Peter. Of its source and influence there seems to be no other evidence except an allusion in Methodius and a quotation by Macarius Magnes. Indeed in the second century Apoca-

<sup>1</sup>cf. James, *Apocryphal N.T.*, pp. XXI, 23, 505-21.

<sup>2</sup>i.e., Saturday before Easter, Sozomen, *H.E.*, VII, 19.

<sup>3</sup>2 Pet. i. 17-8; iii. 7, 10-1.

<sup>4</sup>cf. James, l.c., p. 525. Sozomen l.c. describes and rejects the legend of its discovery, but states that it was esteemed by most of the monks.

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lyptic was not much regarded.<sup>1</sup> Even the Revelation had not won its way to universal acceptance; the Church had not yet begun to rely upon doctrines of future reward and punishment; and the greatest Christian leaders though they are full of the hope of immortality conceive it rather in terms of eternal life than of the Great Assize, rather as the practice of the presence of God than as a succession of events after death. A morbid interest in hell was incompatible with the life and power, the joy and brotherhood, of the Christian society or indeed with its conviction of the worth of the natural order and the grandeur of its own redemptive mission.

Unfortunately, by the end of the century, an influence far more potent than the Apocalypse of St. Peter was operating in an even more unhealthy direction. The sadism which distorted Tertullian's attitude towards sex was inflamed by the persecution in North Africa and expressed itself in a passion for revenge, in promises of immediate glory for the martyrs and an almost ghoulis anticipation of torments for their judges. Such an emphasis is in fact congruous not only with his temperament, but with his theology. His whole concept of the Church is of a benefit-society analogous to those of his time: its creed is the ticket of admission to the privileges of membership; its scriptures the trust-deeds establishing it; its succession of bishops the guarantee that it is the "only and original" purveyor of salvation; its rivals, the heretics, have fraudulent directors and bogus prospectuses; its capital is covenanted by God; its premium is the observance of Catholic order; its value consists in the certainty of a recompense out of all proportion to present dis-

<sup>1</sup>The Apocalypse of Peter was condemned as heretical according to Burkitt, *Jewish and Christian Apocalypses*, p. 44, and Sozomen describes it as "considered spurious by the ancients."



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comforts: prudential considerations make the advantages of belonging to it overwhelming. To enforce these advantages he naturally appealed to threats and promises. Few passages in literature contain more splendid rhetoric than the terrible and quite untranslatable epilogue to the *De Spectaculis*,<sup>1</sup> in which he consoles his readers for being deprived of the excitements of the theatre and the arena by describing for them the spectacle which it will be their privilege to see at the day of judgment when all the pomp and glory and wisdom and worth of heathendom are condemned to everlasting torment and consigned to the undying fire. Elsewhere and especially in two treatises on the subject<sup>2</sup> he deals with the future experiences of the soul, with the martyrs who alone are admitted directly to the presence of God, with hades and its divisions, with judgment and its sequels. Here is a forerunner of the *Divina Commedia* more influential<sup>3</sup> than the Apocalypse of Peter and with it the source from which derive the lurid and fantastic imaginings of medieval and of protestant art, hymnody and preaching. The pains of hell and the scarcely less painful delights of heaven which until very recently figured so largely in popular religion<sup>4</sup> are at once the cause and the evidence of the extent to which a Christian valuation of the natural order has been lost.

The combination of these three influences, promoting an exaggerated stress upon miracle, a horror of the flesh in its most intimate function, and a morbid and largely self-regarding interest in the hereafter, reinforced the dualistic

<sup>1</sup>Translated in part by Gibbon, *Decline and Fall*, II, Chap. 15.

<sup>2</sup>cf. especially *De Resurrectione Carnis* 17 and *De Anima* 55-8.

<sup>3</sup>They were endorsed by Cyprian who here as elsewhere took Tertullian for his master: cf. Ep. lv; *Ad Demetr.* 23-5, etc.

<sup>4</sup>cf. Dearmer, *The Legend of Hell*.

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outlook that characterised Oriental religion and was already deep-seated in the West. To them must be added the depression and disasters of the time. Economic and political causes were bringing the Empire to ruin. Rome for all her administrative, legislative and constitutional greatness failed to recognise or to control tendencies operating slowly but surely for her destruction. Indeed her skill in improvising palliatives and energy in meeting immediate issues often only intensified the evils which were the basic sources of her weakness. In Republican times the system whereby her noble families squandered their wealth in obtaining office as prætors and consuls, and recouped themselves by shameless extortion in the provincial governorships to which office was the prelude, led inevitably not only to the iniquities described in the Verrine Orations but to a draining of the world's wealth into the capital. The reforms of Augustus, brilliant both in their outward observance of traditional forms and in their efficiency in transferring all real power to the Emperor and his civil service, secured the provinces against oppression by individuals, gave the Empire a strong central government, and prepared the way for the transfer from the domination of a city-state to the equal enfranchisement of its dominions. But the system of farming out taxation and public services to the great financial corporations hastened the process of concentrating the world's wealth in a few hands; the squandering of money upon luxury and display, upon buildings and entertainments and doles laid an intolerable burden upon the middle classes; and with the creation of a vast urban proletariat, the depopulation of the countryside, and the consequent shortage of food, social abuses and moral decay were inevitable and rapid. Land went out of

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cultivation; and the Empire depended upon Egypt for its corn-supply. Tax-payers were too precious to be allowed to serve in the armies; and the frontiers could only be guarded by enlisting barbarians. A handful of plutocrats manipulated the finances of the world, and somewhat precariously made and unmade governments. The story is familiar, and not without significance for our own times. But its effect was to sap the vitality of mankind and foster a half-conscious sense of despair. When men feel that they are in the grip of forces which they cannot control and which will ultimately crush them into servitude, they excuse their own helplessness by denouncing the universe.

Political instability hastened the decline. That the Empire survived the depravity of the Claudian house and the chaos that followed the fall of Nero is proof of the worth of the system and the strength of the Roman genius for government. A succession of capable rulers maintained public order until the close of the second century. But after Commodus the task became too great. Economic exhaustion produced civil disturbance: pressure on the frontiers demanded continuous and widespread military activity; the emperor could not be simultaneously controlling the central authority in Rome, protecting the trade routes and food-supply, quelling upheavals in the provinces, and fighting on the Rhine, the Danube and the Euphrates: and to delegate authority was to set up a rival for the throne. In the eighty years between Pertinax and Diocletian there were some twenty-five emperors; and few of them died in their beds. Insecurity destroyed the last remnants of prosperity: civil war threatened to become endemic; there seemed to be no power which could check the total disintegration of society. How

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Diocletian solved the political problem by exacerbating the economic, and how Constantine fastened upon the Church as the only possible cement for the structure of government, are familiar stories. Between them the two great rulers gave a century of further life to the Empire, created the Byzantine throne, and enabled the Church to preserve the name of Rome through the Dark Ages. But to many who watched the course of events in the third and fourth centuries it must have seemed that the fate of Assyria and of the Pharaohs might well fall upon their own civilisation. It is small wonder that all earthly hopes seemed vanity of vanities and that Christianity despairing of this world should translate its gospel into a message of escape.

Yet even so it must not be supposed that the degradation of the *kerygma* was immediate or universal. It was not easy for Christendom to bring its Jewish or Hellenic elements into conformity with a creed of otherworldliness. So long as the Old Testament remained, faith in a living God, who acted here and now, could not be wholly surrendered; and in the Syrian churches there was a tradition which clung to its trust in the worth of nature and of man, and would not easily capitulate to the Augustinian doctrines of their total depravity. The story of the School of Antioch, of its defence of a humanistic and historical theology and of its success in saving Christendom from denial of the manhood of its Master, belongs to our next chapter. But even among the more typically Greek churchmen whose influence was opposed to a high valuation of history there was still a love of nature which could not accept a wholesale condemnation of the creation. Asceticism might overcloud the brightness of the Hellenic genius, but even when the clouds were thickening

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gleams of the ancient splendour broke through. The great Cappadocians, inheriting the Origenist and Platonic tradition, and trained by the best classical learning of the time, not only reveal a passionate love of nature and natural beauty but a clear appreciation of its vital significance for Christianity. Basil's *Hexaemeron* and the version and sequel by his brother, Gregory of Nyssa, are evidence that even the champions of monasticism had not abandoned their Hellenic birthright of delight in the worth of the physical world, or their Christian faith in the possibility of a real act of God within it.

Basil's sermons, delivered extempore to a large and enthusiastic audience, are a remarkable testimony alike to his powers of mind and speech, to his knowledge of the literature of the subject, and to his own interest and observation. He surveys the whole order of nature in the form of an exposition of the story of the Creation, and has gathered together a vast amount of material dealing with the heavens, the firmament, the earth and seas and above all with the characters and habits of plants, birds and animals. Most of his information is drawn from others, from Aristotle and Pliny, Varro and a number of less familiar writers whom he quotes and alludes to with obvious knowledge. But his work is no mere compilation. Original notes and suggestions, some of them like his story of the storks and the ravens a quaint mixture of accurate fact and fantastic explanation, supplement or criticise his authorities. As a picture of the natural history of the time and as evidence that this was not despised by a great ecclesiastic, Basil's work has a permanent importance. Gregory who also wrote a *Hexaemeron* and supplemented it by a book *On the Making*

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of *Man* is less erudite and here as elsewhere much less lucid and orderly, though he has a more profound interest in his subject and greater speculative originality. His is a mind which if it had been free from constant self-distrust and an almost morbid dread of being irreligious would have achieved high eminence. As it is, he is easily fretted into making needless concessions to orthodoxy, and in his treatment of humanity is influenced by the attitude towards sex which we have previously considered.<sup>1</sup> He would have been a happier and better man if he had been left free to follow his love of nature instead of being forced into theological and ecclesiastical controversies for which he was temperamentally ill-fitted. As it is, he constantly reveals a sense of the majesty and mystery of creation hardly compatible with the dogmatism and metaphysics of orthodoxy. When he declares that men who cannot explain the nature of an ant should hesitate about claiming finality for their knowledge of the nature of God, he utters not only a much needed protest but a *cri du cœur*.<sup>2</sup> For him as for the church of his time circumstances were too strong. The gulf between nature and grace had become too wide for them to span.

It is perhaps in the normal public worship of the Church that the widening of this gulf can be most clearly seen; and here we are dealing not with the outlook of a few eminent teachers but with a corporate activity which at once represents and moulds the religion of common folk. In the services of the Synagogue and so far as we can judge also in the prayers of the early Christians a large place was given to benedictions: God was blessed

<sup>1</sup>e.g., in *De Artif. Hom.*, XVII, he argues that God made male and female foreknowing the Fall, but that marriage only came after it.

<sup>2</sup>*Contra Eunomium*, X, 1.

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for His manifold gifts, for His universe and its order, His works and sustaining power. As Christian worship became stereotyped, this element disappeared. To-day it survives only in the Song of the Three Children (the *Benedicite*); and this only appears in the Breviary at Lauds on festivals and at Easter,<sup>1</sup> and is relegated in the Church of England to Advent and Lent, where it is singularly inappropriate unless as a penitential reminder of man's earthly status. So too the festivals, with which Judaism and the pagan world had observed seedtime and harvest, were abandoned or replaced by commemorations of the saints; and no day in the whole Christian year was assigned to celebrating the Creation or associating religion with the order of nature. In the services of the Church the sacred is identified with the supernatural, and the supernatural with the miraculous.

This distortion of the incarnational and sacramental view of the Universe, fatally damaging any integral concept of religion, has thus acquired a permanence which we have hardly yet begun to outgrow. That it controverts the characteristic insistence of the Old Testament, repudiates both the teaching and the true status of Jesus, exaggerates the soteriology of St. Paul and is inconsistent with the outlook and ethos of the Apostolic Church, ought to be enough to condemn it. That it involved and was accompanied by other and equally disastrous distortions we shall show in the following chapters. That its revival at the present time in Continental theology is a chief obstacle to any effective Christian witness and is largely responsible for the growing alienation of Europe from the Christian tradition, can hardly be disputed. While we

<sup>1</sup>It was sung at the Mass in the Gallican liturgy, but now only survives at Milan.

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can sympathise with those who in time of distress and persecution despair of this world and denounce all delight in it as pagan and compromising, we must protest that to do so is to misinterpret the Bible, invalidate the Creed, and transform Christianity from a religion of love and joy and peace into a religion of escape.



## IV

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IF the sacramental value of nature is a necessary corollary to the Christian gospel, belief in a historical event is that gospel's source and primary clause. It may be possible, though it is certainly illogical, to renounce the natural order as totally depraved, and yet to maintain that God has intervened in it to rescue some at least of His creatures by manifesting Himself in bodily form. Indeed such theories were forced upon the Church by the influences that we have been considering; and have constantly been reiterated whenever these influences have prevailed. From the Gnostics to Dr. Barth there has been a succession of theologies framed in terms of a divine intrusion into an alien or hostile universe; and if in their more extreme forms they have been rejected by the Church, no student of orthodoxy can doubt that both Catholic and Protestant thought have been seriously infected by the same tendency. The ingenuity with which such theologies have striven to maintain belief in an incarnation of the Godhead while in fact rejecting the conditions involved in such a belief is proof that Christianity cannot surrender its foundations in history. But whenever a paradox is propounded as a solution, there is a clear challenge to re-examine the premises of the argument. We may ultimately be constrained to admit our incompetence to define: but theologies based upon a contradiction in

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terms and invoking the irrationality of their conclusions as evidence of their truth do not deserve the respect too often accorded to them.

The historical element in Christianity (which alone saves it from becoming a variant upon Mithraism) is in fact too manifestly fundamental to be rejected, even when nature is so interpreted as to make a revelation within the natural order strictly illogical. It may well be doubted even in view of the influences that we have described whether the Church would have been persuaded to endanger the foundations of its faith unless along with the attack upon nature there had been a simultaneous tendency to minimise the significance of history. It is with this that we have now to be concerned.

The Apostolic *kerygma* is as we have seen the proclamation of an act of God in Jesus, an act manifested in His life and work but culminating in and summarised by His death and resurrection. By this event it was claimed that the hope of Israel had been fulfilled: to it therefore the dealings of God with His people under the old dispensation had been preparatory: from it the new community took its origin. The event was a "mystery," a drama by which the secrets of God were unveiled, and by participating in which the disciple was initiated into a new life, delivered from sin, seised of immortality, and admitted to the fellowship of the Spirit. In Christ God's Kingdom had been established; in Christ the believer was reborn into that Kingdom and commissioned to take part in the historic process of completing the work already in a sense complete since the means for its fulfilment were available and the end was assured.

From the first it was clear that the historic event carried with it a metaphysic. To the Jewish Apostles trained to

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regard the creation as God's work and all history as the scene and record of His operation there could be no difficulty here. The Old Testament had told the story of Israel in terms of God's dealings with His world: Pharaoh and Cyrus, not less than their own patriarchs and kings, were His instruments: in disaster as in success the hand of the Lord was revealed and by the evidence of His acts His purpose and nature were disclosed: His servants knew His will and His prophets declared with increasing insight His character. History was the raw material for theology.

With such an inheritance the Apostles could not but continue the tradition. They too were in the succession of the prophets, called to declare from the facts of their experience the purpose and nature of God. Those facts, what the Lord Jesus said and did and what His followers said and did in His name, were recorded in Gospels and Acts from a standpoint identical with that of the books of the Old Testament. History as they saw it was the story of the *Gesta Dei*, the *Gesta Christi*, the *Gesta Spiritus Sancti*. "Our times are in His hand"; "let Him do what seemeth to Him good"; "His servants shall know His will" express the same conviction as their New Testament parallels "We are workers together with God"; "we have the mind of Christ"; "Whoso doeth the works shall learn of the doctrine". Now that God had revealed Himself incarnate in Jesus, both works and doctrine took on a fresh content and significance.

In view both of the familiarity of the subject and of our previous discussion of the Apostolic age it may seem unnecessary to insist upon this attitude to history: for, right or wrong, the New Testament and the Christian religion are manifestly committed to it. We emphasise it, because, fundamental as it is, it did not long remain un-

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changed—in fact if not in intention. If we compare the language of Scripture with that of the Church of later ages, we shall recognise a very notable contrast. In the first place the prophetic note grows faint, indeed almost disappears. Men do not declare the “Thus saith the Lord” of the Old Testament or the “It seemed good to the Holy Ghost and to us” of the New: or if they do, it is on formal occasions and in ecclesiastical accents. It may be that they are wise to be humble: we may hesitate to accept all that the prophets proclaim as emanating from the source to which they ascribe it. But if we may reasonably doubt whether God said “Go and slay Amalek, and utterly destroy all that they have,”<sup>1</sup> yet we can hardly doubt that those who so could speak possessed a sense of the living energy of God and were moved by a genuine constraint which makes their language appropriate and inevitable; and that with its disappearance God’s presence in history and the significance of history itself have become uncertain. That this is not an unfair criticism is borne out by the fact that with the Acts of the Apostles the Scriptural mode of writing history disappears. Eusebius’ Church History, which by its citation of original documents broke away from the Thucydidean tradition and may claim to be the first history in the modern meaning of the word, invaluable as it is, does not attempt to be a record of the Acts of God. If it is agreed that history cannot be a mere compilation of objectively described happenings, but must always be also a selection and an interpretation, then history itself may have lost by being recorded not *sub specie eternitatis* or from the standpoint of faith, but with the personal equation of its human author writ large upon it. In any case religion has suffered from the

<sup>1</sup>1 Sam. xv. 3.

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change; and its adoption reinforces the conclusion that the Apostolic outlook did not long continue.

Does it seem absurd and perhaps repellent to the modern man to urge that God should be thus acknowledged in human speech and records? Most of us whatever our attitude to Bible and Church will naturally raise that question. We are justly afraid of cant,—of the piety which describes trivialities as done under guidance, and of the arrogance which thinks itself qualified to declare God's will. We may properly, knowing our own weakness, hesitate to make any claim to inspiration, and from our experience of others feel distrust of those who are less reticent. But if, as is our present task, we are considering the loss of power in the Church, we cannot fail to connect it with the lack of precisely this sort of inspiration, nor doubt that a renewal of faith would involve a return to this language and outlook. The Scriptures are evidence that men in the earliest and most vital age of Christianity did speak and think in this way—and that without personal pride but under constraint and "moved by the Spirit." We need not, we must not, accept such utterances, past or present, as infallible or beyond criticism: for if we have Apostolic instruction "not to quench the Spirit nor despise prophesyings," we are told in the same breath to "prove all things and hold fast only that which is good."<sup>1</sup> "By their fruits ye shall know them"<sup>2</sup> said Jesus: and the test of fruits involving a right use of reason and conscience is a sufficient safeguard. "Testing the spirits whether they be of God"<sup>3</sup> is an obligation upon the Church: it cannot be fulfilled if men cease to speak in His name.

<sup>1</sup> 1 Thess. v. 19-21.

<sup>2</sup> Matt. vii. 16, 20.

<sup>3</sup> 1 John iv. 1.

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If we inquire how this change took place, we shall see, as has been already suggested, that it was not solely due to a conviction that the world was evil and nature a mass of corruption. There were those, then as now, who denied that history could supply any data as to the character of reality, who looked upon the world of time and space as essentially illusory or argued that the struggles of a "fortuitous coincidence of atoms" could only be "a striving and a striving and an ending in nothing." But such extreme scepticism was rare. Gnostic Dualists, while maintaining that the physical realm was evil, yet argued that the struggle of the spiritual elements imprisoned in it to secure liberation gave the course of events a real significance. Stoic Materialists, while regarding history as a recurrent cycle and therefore logically meaningless, yet left open the belief that the wise man living conformably to nature might emancipate himself by perfecting his self-sufficiency and so survive the conflagration and escape from the wheel of things. Sceptics, for whom the gods were mere projections and personifications, accepted the existence of demons and saw value in individual and civic effort. It was not by these that the Christian attitude towards history was altered, but by the heirs of the purest Hellenic tradition, the great Christian Platonists whose influence upon the Church was of paramount importance and high religious value.

It is hardly possible to over-estimate the contribution of Greek thought to the development of Christianity: indeed those who claim that Christendom owes its present form to the fusion of Hebraic with Hellenistic elements, to Plato hardly less than to Judaism, can present a strong case. It would be fanciful to suggest that, when the pupil of Gamaliel and the beloved physician set out together to

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bring the gospel to Europe, their partnership was more than symbolic—for St. Luke, Greek as he is, shows his race rather in his mastery of style, his love of the dramatic, his visualising, his universalism, and perhaps his inability to appreciate his companion's sense of sin than in the special qualities associated with the Platonists. But, as we recognise how deeply the whole structure of Christian theology is impregnated with Greek influence—recognise indeed that in every department of Christian thought there is evidence of their work and that the foremost minds in Christendom have constantly returned to their tradition—we shall be unwilling to minimise or criticise their gift to the Church. If in accommodating the gospel to their needs and outlook a certain distortion of its emphasis took place, this should not lessen our gratitude.

At first sight their influence would seem to reinforce and make articulate the Apostolic conviction of the value of history. For in their adoption of the term *Logos* as descriptive of the person and work of Christ they were able not only to find common ground on which Jews with their belief in the Word of the Lord and Greeks who accepted an "indwelling reason" as the divine element in nature and the characteristic possession of mankind could combine, but to develop an interpretation of history as a manifestation of the creative, educative and incarnate Word. *Logos* as both the thought and the utterance of God is both source and instrument of Creation. He speaks to His creatures as their guide and trainer; He speaks in them, for the rational principle is a seed or spark of His own divine nature. The Law of Israel and the philosophy of Hellas derive from Him; Heracleitus and Socrates not less than Abraham and Moses obeyed Him and are Christians before Christ. When in the fulness of time He

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was made flesh it was not to a world estranged but to a world prepared that He came; the whole process of history had led up to the stage at which He could reveal Himself fully and face to face. Such a system outlined by Justin and the Greek Apologists, amplified by Clement of Alexandria and elaborated in detail if with a change of terminology by Origen, gave to the Church a coherent background for its teaching and a philosophy of history which did full justice to the *kerygma*.

The great Greeks had no wish to depreciate, still less to deny, the value of historical events: they could not have done so without repudiating their heritage. But if that heritage contained a passionate appreciation of the world of the senses and a power of casting history into a dramatic form so as to disclose its significance,<sup>1</sup> it also contained a deep-seated conviction that multiplicity was somehow resolvable into unity, that the sensible world drew its worth from a reality that lay beyond it, and that the business of the philosopher was to disclose the one in the many, the realm of true being in the things that come and pass. It is not necessary here to discuss the sources from which Plato drew his doctrine of ideas or the vexed question as to its place in his thought. It is sufficient for us to note that it is precisely the dialogue in which he most clearly expounds it, the *Republic*, and in that dialogue passages like the similes of the line and the cave, that were the chief sources of the Platonism of later times and gave their character to the Fathers of the Logos-theology. That Christians should fasten upon the *Republic* in view of what must have seemed to them its prophetic description of the fate of the righteous ("I suppose," says

<sup>1</sup>Of this Thucydides is the outstanding example: cf. Cornford, *Thucydides Mythistoricus*, and the discussions to which that book gave rise.



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Socrates, "that he will be scourged, racked, bound and at last crucified"<sup>1</sup>) and of the amazingly relevant imagery of the cave, is not surprising: having done so they would inevitably get also from it as from Platonism in general the belief that history was after all only a shadow of reality and that it was the business of philosophy to draw men from opinions about the phenomenal to knowledge of the eternal.

That, despite his efforts to establish a clear relationship between the two spheres and to expound how the ideal is embodied in and discernible through the objects of sense, Plato does not succeed in bridging the gulf between them, is a conclusion to which the student is reluctantly compelled. That in his greatest dialogues he asserts their relationship, that he cannot justly be accused either of reducing sense-perception to mere illusion or of putting forward the world of ideas as mere poetry and metaphor, and that his method of defining general notions is an attempt to proceed by induction from the data of the sense to an understanding of their significance, these constitute his claim to be a master of philosophy. But his success, indeed his own satisfaction with the theory, are open to doubt; and Aristotle in rejecting it had much to justify him. But if he failed, it was in a "noble contest"; and the conviction that history reveals a meaning, indeed that events are important not only or chiefly in themselves, but from the light which they throw upon reality and the opportunities which they provide for its apprehension, is inherent in any spiritual outlook upon the universe. Platonism only had a distorting effect upon Christianity because, in its failure to reach a result which should show the nexus between phenomena and ideas and thus give

<sup>1</sup>Plato, *Republic* II, 361E, quoted by Clement Alex. *Strom.* V, 14.

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worth to both, it tended to treat the ideal sphere as alone possessed of value or permanence and to despise the phenomenal as unable in the last resort to give access to reality and as therefore insignificant and ephemeral.

This sense of the relative unimportance of history comes out so plainly in and after Origen and had so great an influence upon the future of Christianity that it must be examined more closely. For if pressed it contradicts the fundamental message of the gospel and leads directly to the belief that the sole value of the historic Jesus is to be found in the speculative metaphysic suggested by His story, and that consequently the authenticity of that story and indeed the very existence of Jesus are of little moment. How was it that a man of such profound learning and manifest devotion as Origen could have failed to see that such a substitution of "facts of faith" for "facts of history" would transform Christianity into a pious legend? That this was certainly not his intention does not answer the question.

The clue to an answer is perhaps best found in the exegetical method which he and his predecessors adopted. When Christianity inherited the Old Testament, the problem of its interpretation became acute. It could not be taken literally: for, as Marcion easily demonstrated, it contradicted the New. To assert its literal authority was to invite its rejection. By us in these days, as by the School of Antioch in the fourth century, the difficulty is easily met. Let it be studied historically, with full regard to the authorship, date, circumstances and outlook of its several books and full allowance for the human limitations imposed on them. Such would seem the obvious method for those who accepted a belief that in it God was speaking,

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but who realised that His message was incomplete and, as St. Paul had shown, in parts at least erroneous. But unfortunately another method was available, and was more congruous both with the customs of the time and with the reverence for the sacred oracles. The allegorical interpretation of ancient and venerable writings was already well-established both in pagan and in Jewish circles.<sup>1</sup>

Since language is itself a use of symbolism, and since the use of metaphor and parable is universal, the belief that behind what professes to be a narrative of events not less than in legend and poetry there is a hidden meaning cannot be condemned out of hand. Even if Homer genuinely believed in the existence and quarrels of the Olympians or the authors of the Pentateuch conceived of God as having a voice and hands and hinder parts, subsequent ages finding such beliefs distasteful and yet revering the books that contained them felt at liberty to interpret them symbolically. So Heracleitus of Pontus had dealt with the Iliad: so Philo had expounded Genesis. The Delphic oracle and the prophets of Israel had employed allegories: gradually the use of types and numbers, of cryptogram and enigma, had been given precision: the book of Daniel and the Apocalypse may well have been written in an elaborate code whose allusions would be readily and clearly understood by their contemporaries: the use and explanation of such language became a recognised department of learning. Thus when the writer to the Hebrews uses Melchizedek as a type of Christ or sees in the details of Jewish ritual a foreshadowing of the gospel, or when the First Evangelist wrenches the language of the Old Testament into predictions of the descent into Egypt or

<sup>1</sup>cf. Hatch, *The Influence of Greek Ideas upon the Church*, pp. 50-85.

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the entombment, they are only following a well-established convention. The Epistle of Barnabas shows to what lengths and with what ingenuity the method could be employed.

The sanctity of the Old Testament and the impossibility of accepting it literally made the use of allegory almost universal. The stress laid upon *Testimonia*, texts chosen to illustrate the character of Christ and to substantiate the facts of his life, may well be as primitive as the argument from prophecy—and is indeed only a variant of it. At least it goes back to the days when the Church having no Scriptures of its own was employing the Old Testament in its services and psalmody and helping thereby to undo the protests of St. Paul against judaizing. Books whose chief employment was oracular came to be regarded as essentially symbolic, and passages which by no ordinary exegesis could ever be regarded as Messianic or even edifying were chosen for the very subtlety of their symbolism as the most striking proofs of the divine origin of Christianity: the more cryptic the testimony and far-fetched the interpretation, the more certainly was the message from God and not from men.

So there was developed the method of which Clement of Alexandria and Origen are the masters. Scripture is of course inspired: but its inspiration lies not in the plain meaning with which the vulgar are satisfied, but is esoteric and deeply-hidden, only to be discovered by the expert who can detect allusions, transpose types, manipulate figures, and so at last unlock the treasure-house and bring out its contents. Clement's vast erudition, Origen's tireless study gave them a skill which is sometimes so brilliant as to conceal the absurdity of the method: we forget that they have merely read into the text what they

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profess to read out of it; and that by such means the value of Scripture as a criterion is in fact destroyed since its significance depends entirely on the ingenuity of the interpreter.

To handle Scripture thus is inevitably to adopt a corresponding attitude towards history. If the Gospels are only a record of facts to the simple, if in a scholar's hands they become allegories whose true worth is in their mystical or metaphysical meaning, then when once the riddle has been solved the passage containing it can be thrown aside: the kernel has been extracted, the husk is now empty. The Platonists, accepting their task as the discovery of the eternal in and beyond the ephemeral, and employing the method of allegorising upon the evidence, were inevitably disposed to look upon history as of importance only to simple believers and to urge their pupils to pass beyond it. This is in fact what was done: the familiar and inexhaustible stories of the life of Christ are milk for babes; the mature Christian is concerned not with them nor with events but with the timeless metaphysical speculations which they enigmatically adumbrate. The living God who acts in His creation is replaced by "the Father of lights with whom is no change nor shadow of turning"—and that is a disaster to religion.

If Platonism and allegorising fostered this distortion of the Apostolic faith, their influence was supplemented by a further tendency of the schools. Religion must express itself in terms of a philosophy: but philosophy so far as it is an activity of the intellect is always liable to transform religion into a scheme of thought and exaggerate its metaphysical at the expense of its emotional and ethical elements. Plato, who had in him much of the poet and something of the saint, never lost sight of the importance

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of the affections, insisted upon the primacy of the eternal values, and used language about love and the idea of the good which the religious could adopt as their own. But Aristotle whose interests were scientific and methodological developed a concept of God as the First Cause, the Changeless, the Wholly Transcendent which left no room for any vital religion; and the Academics though professing Platonism desiccated their master's teaching into a logical and lifeless scepticism. When the Christian Platonists undertook to provide the Church with a philosophy, they could hardly escape attaching undue weight to metaphysics and regarding God in terms of infinite and unqualified Being. The Absolute was half-unconsciously substituted for the Father.

The Apologists escaped the full effects of this tendency by ascribing to the Logos all the aspects and activities of the Godhead with which religion is concerned. Their theology was ultimately binitarian and the distinction between God and the Logos was that between transcendence and immanence: God was the source of all being who for the purpose of creation "uttered" His Word; but the Word thus springing into an almost independent existence took over all the functions of Deity; to speak of Him as a Second God and to reduce the Father to a position of purely theoretical importance was the natural result of such a system. Clement, at once more profound in his insight and more ethical in his interests, insists not only upon the unity of the Godhead as consisting in the mutual and creative love of God and His Word,<sup>1</sup> but upon the concern of God in the whole process of the sustaining, educating and saving of the world.<sup>2</sup> If he is in-

<sup>1</sup>*Paedagogus* I, 8, etc.

<sup>2</sup>*Protrepticus* 12; *Paedagogus* I, 3, etc.

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clined to identify sin with ignorance, and to give priority to the intellect rather than the will, he never sacrifices religion to metaphysics or neglects the importance of history. Logically his teaching does not differ widely from that of his predecessors: it is customary to regard him as muddle-headed because he refuses to press logic to its conclusion. In fact his robust and practical Christianity not less than his massive learning and discursive style saves him from transforming the faith into a scheme of thought.

It is with Origen that the tension between religion and philosophy becomes acute; and in the present state of scholarship while we are still waiting for a full estimate of the greatest of all Christian students it is rash to speak of that tension in detail. His achievements testify to his many-sidedness: to have been the pioneer in the scientific study of textual criticism, of biblical exegesis, of apologetics, and of dogmatic theology—the *Hexapla*, the *Commentaries*, the *Contra Celsum* and the *De Principiis* lay the foundations in the four departments, and any one of them would have been a good life's work; to have been the teacher who sent out from his school all the great bishops of the East; and to have won a position as the accredited champion of the Church against heretics and heathen; these constitute an unrivalled record.<sup>1</sup> But the variety of his interests, the breadth of his knowledge (he was a master of all the "secular" subjects as well as of theology), and the speed of his production (he was equipped with short-hand writers and copyists, and his books were produced from lectures) make it almost impossible to do full justice to his thought. When we

<sup>1</sup>Butterworth in his recent book, *Origen on First Principles*, pays generous tribute both to his achievements and to his character, cf. pp. i-vi.

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remember that after his condemnation his books were proscribed and that many of them survive only in fragments and the most important, the *De Principiis*, only in extracts and an admittedly bowdlerized Latin translation, the difficulty of the task will be realised.

The characteristics of his theology can be broadly described as a combination of metaphysical interests at once wider and more profound than those of the predecessors whom in general he resembles with a knowledge of and reverence for the Scriptures such as no previous Churchman had approached, and with a detachment even a mysticism of outlook for which his self-mutilation is perhaps partially responsible. He is in the succession of the Christian Platonists, and in many passages shares with Clement the concept of creation and redemption as a continuous evolutionary and educational process, in which God, eternally generating His Son and operative through Him, finds the fulfilment of His own nature. But he is never content with process and is always trying to see the facts of history not as a temporal sequence but as manifesting and in some degree constituting an eternal pattern. This leads him to assert that the relation of God to His creation is not an episode in but a permanent condition of the divine existence. There must always have been a transcendent universe in which God could express His love. The Logos cannot be brought into "utterance" at a point of time; the generation of the Son is as perpetual an element in the Godhead as the light is in the orb of day. Souls though they "shrank away" from their communion with God by a fall "in time," yet are by nature eternal and have neither beginning nor end. Evil, though Origen has a deeper sense of its power than other Greek theologians, has no eternal existence: the devil



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like all created beings will ultimately be saved—a hope which caused indignation and disgust two centuries later.<sup>1</sup>

Such beliefs and the intention underlying them have led De Faye<sup>2</sup> to declare that Origen is at heart a Gnostic and would like to identify physical existence with evil, or at least to deny to it any share in reality; that he was only deterred from this by his loyalty to the Bible; and that while stating his views in biblical language and recognising that simple Christians would not appreciate their inner meaning he held and taught to the adepts an esoteric system which differed widely from Scripture and tradition. There is good reason for this verdict especially in the *De Principiis* where Origen revealed his philosophy and where the Latin version demonstrably conceals his heterodoxy. In it he is facing the basic problem of evil—how can the facts of sin and of the inequality of human suffering be reconciled with belief in the love, goodness and justice of God. He is too profound a theist to be content with the easy dualism of a devil who can defy and frustrate God, and too strong a moralist to make God the cause of evil.<sup>3</sup> So he lays stress on the freedom of the creature; develops his theory of pre-existence and a series of re-births, so that present status is determined in accordance with past use or misuse of opportunities; and regards earthly life as a middle stage between the higher and more spiritual life of the angels and the lower and more gross of the demons. To represent this as equivalent to saying that “the entire cosmic process is a mistake, due to the misuse

<sup>1</sup>cf. Jerome, *Ep.* 61. “Origen is a heretic . . . he supposes that the devil may repent.”

<sup>2</sup>*Origen and His Work* (the Olaus Petri lectures) and *Origène sa vie*, etc., (3 vols.).

<sup>3</sup>*De Princ.* I, 5, 3, etc.

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of free-will"<sup>1</sup> or as implying that matter is itself evil,<sup>2</sup> would seem to disregard Origen's insistence upon the creative love and goodness of God<sup>3</sup> and the necessity of freedom of choice among all rational creatures.<sup>4</sup> If it is true that "his speculations are only remotely connected with the Christian faith,"<sup>5</sup> this is fully in accord with his own warnings that they are tentative.<sup>6</sup> We may urge that he is too prone to identify redemption with education and thus over-emphasise the importance of knowledge; to treat history as he treats Scripture allegorically; and to stress the holiness and justice rather than the love of God. But this is not to admit that he was less orthodox than the Greek thinkers who preceded and followed him.

That Origen uses language compatible with this criticism cannot be denied. God is described as beyond even the category of being and given the attributes of changelessness and infinity. We may not predicate of Him even goodness or truth; for these are relative terms; and in His proper nature He transcends the sphere of relativity. So far (and for theology the concept of God is of primary importance) this, if it stood alone, would justify De Faye's estimate. But if we consider the passages in which language of this kind occurs, we find that in them he is consciously approaching theology on its metaphysical side and while claiming that this approach is important he does not insist upon it as solely appropriate. The consciousness of creaturehood, the conviction that when human thought and effort in response to revelation have

<sup>1</sup>So Butterworth, *Origen on First Principles*, p. xxxvi.

<sup>2</sup>Whereas he insists that it was created by God, *De Princ.* II, 1, 4.

<sup>3</sup>e.g., *De Princ.* II, 1, 2; *c. Cels.* I, 71, etc.

<sup>4</sup>cf. *De Princ.* I, 5, 3; 8, 3, and especially the noble passage, III, 1. (*Philocalia*, 21.)

<sup>5</sup>Butterworth l.c., p. xxxv.

<sup>6</sup>*De Princ.* I, 8, 4; III, 6, 9, etc.

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done their uttermost they are impotent to attain adequate knowledge of God, lead every reverent mind to an acknowledgment of its own finitude and of the immeasurable majesty of the eternal. It is only when this moment in religion is divorced from the complementary experience which asserts that along with and in spite of the divine transcendence the self-same God is apprehended and revealed to His creatures by a real communion, that it becomes open to legitimate objection. In Origen's case there is abundant evidence that along with the insistence upon metaphysical infinity he clings not less firmly to belief in a true revelation in time and space, in the incarnation in Jesus and in the life of the Church. Indeed no one can read his *Contra Celsum* without feeling that he has a far wider and (if we may so put it) far more modern<sup>1</sup> grasp of history as a whole and a deeper appreciation of the continuous purpose manifested in it than any other Father of the Church. It may not be possible logically to reconcile the two sides of the paradox: Origen with his readiness to state alternative doctrines certainly appreciated the difficulty of doing so. But De Faye's interpretation of his position can only be justified if a large amount of his work is regarded as either immature or deliberately designed for simple believers.<sup>2</sup>

That Origen with his massive knowledge of the science and history of his time and his insistence upon the eternity of the universe and the length and importance of the educative process should have been in spite of this at heart a dualist, is a conclusion which seems unfair and far-fetched. But it is none the less true that his successors and pupils, destroying the balance of his thought by

<sup>1</sup>cf., e.g., his arguments on the Virgin-birth quoting the scientists of his time (*c. Cels.* I, 33) or on the time of Christ's coming (*l.c.*, IV, 8).

<sup>2</sup>As De Faye admits, *Origen and his Work*, pp. 112.

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rejecting speculations which lay outside the traditional teaching of the Church, were left with a theology which over-emphasised the metaphysical concept of God at the expense of history. Rejecting his teaching as to the eternal relationship of the universe to God and the ultimate salvation of all creatures, they sacrificed his sense of the abiding significance of nature and of the organic unity of history. A tendency to state the nature of God in terms of the antithesis between divine and human, and to describe Deity as changeless, immortal, impassible becomes much more evident towards the close of the third century. With it comes the readiness to define Christ as a second God and to contrast Him with the Father which is noticeable in Dionysius of Alexandria and Eusebius of Caesarea, and which connects the Origenists with Arius. With it also, and in reaction against the subordination of the Son, comes a strong insistence upon His impassibility and changelessness: for if God is impassible and the Son is God, then the Son too must be the antithesis of ourselves. The stage is thus set for the Arian controversy.

A similar distortion followed upon the change of terminology from Logos to Son. The Logos-theology may be open to criticism as binitarian: its simple formula, God is both the transcendent Father and the immanent Logos, is no doubt open to objection. But when the Logos was superseded by the Son and this simple scheme abandoned, the immediate effect was to diminish the stress upon immanence and ultimately to remove both Son and Father from any real contact with mankind. Origen himself had employed the term Son rather than Logos in loyalty to the Scriptures, but he maintained the archetypal relationship between the Logos and mankind and the inspirational functions of the Logos—points which had been character-

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istic of his predecessors. The Origenists, as the term Son became general, ignored the contact with human nature which Logos asserted, and confined the activity of the Son to the acts of creation and incarnation. If they had developed a doctrine of the Holy Spirit (a theme on which Origen is necessarily vague) and had attached to the Spirit the immanental activities formerly ascribed to the Logos, the change would have been valuable: it would have transformed the binitarianism of the Logos-theology into a trinitarian scheme without loss. But, since Montanism, orthodoxy had been inclined to restrict the work of the Spirit within ecclesiastical channels; and the Origenists, attaching the immanental activities (which are vital if nature and history are to be given real value) neither to the Son nor to the Spirit, allowed them to drop out of Christian doctrine. Thus whereas in the Logos-theology there had been an explicit acknowledgment of the divine purpose and presence in the creation and history of the world, in the gradual development and the distribution of races of mankind, in the growth of knowledge, order and morality, so that the Incarnation was seen as the culmination of an age-old and world-wide process, later thought was focused only upon the act of creation and upon the special revelation of the Holy Spirit described in the Scriptures. The concept of God was narrowed and impoverished: and the resulting doctrine deprived the non-Jewish world of any share in the "preparation of the gospel"; treated all secular events as meaningless; and led to the denial of all worth to pagan virtue. To compare Clement's doctrine of the Educative Word or Origen's treatment of history with, for example, Cyril of Jerusalem's lectures on the Son and the Holy Spirit is to discover that Christianity in the fourth century no longer

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possesses a philosophy of history and is indeed confined to biblical and ecclesiastical interests. This failure to preserve the functions of the Logos is a change full of significance for all subsequent theology: it accounts for the poverty of the Church's thought on the subject of the Holy Spirit, for the shrinkage of the scope of Christian philosophy after the third century, and for its failure to do justice to the truth expressed by immanentism.

So, too, in regard to the person of Christ, Origen had insisted upon the reality of the human nature: the human soul of Jesus had not fallen in its pre-incarnate state, but had maintained its union with the Logos. When his successors abandoned the doctrine of pre-existence they could still have preserved the full manhood: but when in the controversy with Paul of Samosata they insisted that the divine Son was the personal centre of Christ and failed to explain the attributes of growth and suffering on which Paul had laid stress, they paved the way for Apollinarius and the Monophysites. The effect of their failure is seen in the constant efforts of Athanasius to explain away every trace of human limitations from the records in the Gospels, and to depict a Christ whose manhood is a shrine or cloak for His divinity. If the exegesis of the early Alexandrians had transformed the teaching of Jesus into metaphysical allegories, their successors explained His birth, baptism, temptations, sufferings and death as a self-conscious and theatrical masquerade, a stage-play in which the Son of God acted the part of a son of man.

It is not necessary here to repeat at length the evidence which compels the acceptance of this verdict.<sup>1</sup> The Arians had confronted the Church with an argument in the form of a simple syllogism: the Creator differs from the creature

<sup>1</sup>cf. my *Apollinarianism*, especially pp. 60-85.

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as the changeless from the changeable; Christ on the evidence of the New Testament is capable of change; therefore Christ is a creature and essentially different from God. It is proof of the extent to which Greek thought had abandoned history and distorted the Apostolic *kerygma* that the major premiss went unchallenged. Athanasius in all his anti-Arian treatises strove to disprove the minor premiss; and surrendered the manhood of Jesus in so doing. Apollinarius explicitly accepted this surrender, formulated a doctrine which denied a human mind to Jesus, and supported this denial by the familiar theories of self-emptying and the transference of attributes. Cyril of Alexandria owed his theology to Apollinarius though his language was less clear and candid. Eutyches and Dioscurus, influenced by the monastic denunciation of the flesh, exaggerated the Apollinarian theory by representing the humanity of Christ as so completely absorbed into the Godhead, as to leave doubts of the reality of His physical nature and to remove Him wholly from our species.

It is commonly argued that this theology, which in fact reduces the incarnation to a mere theophany or divine intrusion into an alien world, had a deep soteriological motive. That the aphorism "only the very God can save a man like me" expresses a sound intuition will not be disputed: it is the basis of the conviction that one who could reveal God and regenerate mankind as Jesus had done (and does) can only be explained in terms of divinity. But when this is used to justify a denial of the manhood, it must be recognised that salvation has in the fifth century come to mean something quite different from its meaning in the Apostolic age. Then man was saved for and by a life of service: salvation was life "in Christ" here and now.

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In the time of Athanasius it had already been identified with immortality, with life hereafter; and a century later its scope was not the service of Christ in the world but the saving of the soul for heaven. If religion is not a redemption of the physical but an escape from it, then a divine-human Saviour will naturally be replaced by a deity who has no real contact with the prison-house of the body. A Monophysite soteriology logically demands a Monophysite Christology: but neither of them is Apostolic or in fact orthodox.

That the Church was saved from this avowed distortion of the gospel was due as is well-known to one of the most momentous "accidents" in history. The School of Antioch which had preserved a firm grip upon the historical facts of the life of Christ and a strong humanist and Aristotelian philosophy had answered Arianism by asserting the true human nature of Christ and attaching to His humanity the attributes of change. Eustathius the bishop of Antioch, who was a president of the Nicene Council, had been attacked on this score not only by the Arians but by more orthodox Greek churchmen. Diodorus his successor was more directly assailed by Apollinarius. Theodore of Mopsuestia, taking up the challenge, not only defended the humanity of Jesus by elaborating a Christology of the two natures, but based this defence upon a thoroughly scientific treatment of Scripture and a clear appreciation of the value of history. Under him the School became the avowed opponent of Alexandria, attacking its allegorical exegesis, its metaphysical theology, and its Apollinarian doctrine of the Incarnation. That the Antiochene criticism was acute and well-founded, and its conclusions much more in harmony with the New Testament and with Apostolic Christianity, as well as with the scholarship of to-day,



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is hardly disputable. Indeed from the modern standpoint its defects arise out of its failure to get wholly free from the general presupposition of the time, an ascetic and monastic view of nature, and from an Aristotelian emphasis on the Absolute Being of God; and these prevented it from reaching a wholly satisfactory statement of the unity of God and man in Christ and exposed it to the charge of teaching two Christs. But the effort was meritorious and timely.

Nevertheless it appeared doomed to condemnation. Cyril by ingenuity, intrigue and bribery secured the banishment and anathematising of Nestorius in 431; and when Flavian of Constantinople, another member of the School, attacked Eutyches, he was arraigned and brutally assaulted at the so-called Robber Synod at Ephesus in 449. This verdict left Dioscurus and Monophysite theology supreme in the East—a result in accord with the general trend of Greek Christianity which was now and had always been predominantly Alexandrian in character. The Church might well have permanently disavowed history and the manhood of Christ, if the emperor who had supported Dioscurus had not been thrown from his horse and killed, before the dispute was finally settled. This gave Leo of Rome, who had written his famous Tome against Eutyches and resented the verdict of Ephesus, the opportunity to reopen the matter with the new emperor. He agreed to convene another Council and used his influence against Dioscurus. At Chalcedon the bishops who two years previously had condemned Flavian now revised their verdict. Dioscurus was condemned; a formula preserving the human nature of Christ was drawn up; Nestorius was avenged if not vindicated; the Monophysites were driven into schism; and the Eastern Church, rent a

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second time, was fatally weakened. That the Alexandrian theology was by this time and despite Chalcedon the orthodoxy of the East is proved by the subsequent condemnation of Theodore, a century and more after his death, and by the repeated efforts to assimilate Chalcedonian to Monophysite doctrine.

That Chalcedon revealed "the bankruptcy of Greek theology"<sup>1</sup> is probably true. By this time the antithesis between God and man had become so much a commonplace that any real union of the two in Christ would have been a contradiction in terms. The Greeks were too intelligent to be content with Leo's doctrine of alternate action—a Christ who at certain times acted as God and at others as man—or to share his delight in paradoxes. But in effect they had accepted a divorce of God from nature and history so complete that an incarnation in any real sense was impossible for them. Greek thought fades after Chalcedon as it had faded after Aristotle into disputation about phrases and formulæ, in which either the old battles are fought out again in terms of quotations and arguments from authority, or a catch-word, like the *enhypostasia* of Leontius, which in fact possessed no concrete or verifiable content, was paraded as a symbol and acclaimed as a solution. Having abandoned history symbolism itself became meaningless. Even speculation is impossible if the data given by observation are ignored. Theology becomes a mere logomachy.

If the metaphysical interests of Eastern Churchmen thus led them to an abandonment of history, the more practical outlook of the Latins reached a similar result by a different and characteristic road. The important figure here is the greatest and most influential of all Western

<sup>1</sup>Temple, *Foundations*, p. 230; *Christus Veritas*, p. 134.

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Christians, Augustine, in whom the patristic age found its last and in some respects noblest representative, and the whole subsequent period its chief formative inspiration. Augustine combined profound spiritual experience with psychological insight, intellectual powers, practical capacity and passionate energy. Bringing to the Church the results of his long and restless search for God, and a clear and coherent understanding of what his conversion had meant for him, he was able, in the midst of the calamities that followed the sack of Rome, to work out a theological system which is at once less metaphysical than that of Origen and more closely related to the moral and practical needs of mankind. It is the theology of a pastor and of a scholar, of a churchman and of a philosopher—a theology from which all subsequent teachers Catholic and Protestant have drawn unexhausted stores of thought.

Augustine in spite of his great debt to Platonism and Plotinus<sup>1</sup> unlike the Greeks “was a man historically minded.”<sup>2</sup> His own hard-won experience meant more to him than his learning or even than the tradition which he so strenuously upheld. It is to it that he constantly returns, and from it that he expounds the faith. In this respect his *Confessions* are typical of him: “come hither and hearken, and I will show what God has done for my soul” is the text of all his work. As such he could not dismiss the sphere of phenomena as unimportant<sup>3</sup> or, for

<sup>1</sup>cf. Burnaby, *Amor Dei*, pp. 25-42: this debt involves what his own experience of conversion emphasises, the contrast between the changing and the changeless, and this affects his attitude to history.

<sup>2</sup>Figgis, *Aspects of St. A's City of God*, p. 34.

<sup>3</sup>He has a real though slight interest in nature; cf. Cunningham, *St. Austin*, pp. 137-41, and in his best thought an insistence upon the revelation of God in it which is incompatible with the Augustinian belief in its total depravity, cf. Burnaby, *Amor Dei*, p. 157, etc.

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all his admiration for Plato, subordinate history to metaphysics. He would seem the fit person to create a true philosophy of history; and in the *De Civitate Dei* that expectation is partially fulfilled.

The outline of this philosophy is familiar. In books XI to XXII of that great but somewhat formless work he describes the two "cities"—the one founded by Cain, typified by Babel, rising to its zenith in Assyria and Rome and the "four kingdoms" of the book of Daniel, seeking peace by worldly dominion and having no eternal hope: the other going back through Shem to Seth, entering its second period with Abraham and its third with the Mosaic Law, represented by the Hebrew nation and culminating in the Christian Church whose present kingdom is the millennial reign of Christ on earth; both awaiting the judgment when they will be finally separated, the one to the pains of the damned, the other to the peace of heaven.

To call the book a philosophy of history is to read into it more than its author intended. The *De Civitate* is an apology for the Church, and history enters in as revealing the ages of its existence in a fixed scheme that begins with the Fall and ends with the Doom, a scheme adumbrated by prophecy and analogous to the ages of man.<sup>1</sup> But, whatever its intention, its interpretation, elaborated in the seven books<sup>2</sup> of Augustine's friend and follower Orosius, dominated the concept of history for a thousand years.

Its characteristic is the rigid distinction drawn between the two cities. They exist simultaneously: they even interact: but they are wholly separate in quality and

<sup>1</sup>i.e., youth without law, Adam to Abraham; virility and law, to Christ; age and grace, the Church.

<sup>2</sup>*History against the Pagans*. King Alfred's translation into Anglo-Saxon illustrates its influence.

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destiny. If at this stage of his thought Augustine does not quite say (as he did later) that the good works of the unbaptised are evil, he is more hostile to any heathen, even to Plato, than Clement or Origen and is bound to maintain that they have no share in any abiding reward. Their virtue earns for them power and fame in the earthly city: in the city of God they have neither part nor lot. Hence he is not really concerned with them or with the events in which they had a share; and the only history that has any permanent meaning is that of the Church. When in his later writings he denounced all mankind as hopelessly corrupt and insisted upon a strict determinism, he was only fulfilling the implications of the *De Civitate*. Later ages reading it in the light of his doctrine of predestination could only see history as the working out of a fore-ordained plan to which all secular happenings were strictly irrelevant.

It is unnecessary to argue that this treatment destroys quite as effectively as Greek speculation any integral or incarnational view of history. It is merely a record of the intrusions of the supernatural into an alien world, intrusions discernible in past or future because following a revealed schema. Details of this schema might vary in different authors according to the particular prophecies or allegorisings on which its interpretation was based. But the general plan was the same. The whole story of God's dealings with the world was divided into a number of periods or reigns according to the method of computation; three corresponding to the three Persons of the Godhead, the first pre-Christian, the second from Christ to the year A.D. 1000, the third a millennium of the Spirit; or eight corresponding to the times indicated in the book of Daniel; or seven foreshadowed by the days of creation in

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Genesis.<sup>1</sup> There had been periods of preparation for the coming of the Heavenly Kingdom; there were now periods of tribulation while the Kingdom or Church confronted the world; then there would be "times of refreshment" when it would triumph and be supreme. These might be heralded by events like the sack of Rome or the arrival of a particular date: for such "signs" the Christian must be prepared. But he could not hasten or delay the working out of the scheme; nor need he be concerned to relate it to secular happenings. God would bring the calamities which closed each period by intrusion of the supernatural into the natural.

Croce<sup>2</sup> and others have shown how widely this view of history dominated the whole thinking of Christendom from the fifth century onwards. While it prevailed the *Gesta Dei* were necessarily identified with the miracles ascribed to the saints and recorded in their legends. The earlier view of a progressive and intelligible education of mankind or of secular events as shadowing forth the idea of God was obviously incompatible with it. If history persisted at all, it could only be in the form of chronicles which had no significance for religion and whose purpose was to record not to interpret, to amuse and not to explain. Christ was banished from the world. Its progress and character became wholly estranged from Him. Only by the mediation of miracle-working saints whose legends tended to take the place both of Scripture and of history could disaster be averted. Such was the belief of the society which claimed to represent the Church of the Apostles.

The proof of this distortion of the *kerygma* is to be seen in the almost total neglect of the Gospel records of the

<sup>1</sup>This, the most usual classification, derives from Augustine, *De Genes c. Manich.*

<sup>2</sup>Especially in *History of Historiography*.

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teaching and life of Jesus and indeed of the whole Scripture. The Manger and the Cross remain, partly as symbolising the doctrines of Incarnation and Atonement, partly as presenting in extreme form the paradox of the divine condescension. Certain texts valuable for supporting moral discipline or ecclesiastical pretensions are freely quoted. The events commemorated in the great festivals maintain their place—though these festivals tend to be emphasised for their supernatural and theological meaning and to be embellished with legendary accretions. But for the rest the earthly life of Jesus disappears and a multitude of saints, some purely mythical, takes His place.

If we look away from the work of theologians to the interests of the Christian community in general, the extent of the change becomes even more apparent. Typical of it is the alteration in the significance of the Epiphany. The sixth of January had been observed from earliest times and as one, perhaps even the greatest, of the three primitive festivals, to commemorate the event with which our oldest Gospel begins, the Baptism of Jesus. Under theological influences this was interpreted with special stress on the revelation of the Trinity—the voice of the Father and the descent of the Spirit. Then by inclusion of the birth it celebrated the incarnation until Christmas, December 25, was introduced from Rome where it was a counterblast to the Saturnalia. At this stage the Epiphany becomes connected with the Magi; and all other associations are gradually forced into the background, as the legends of the Three Kings are multiplied and the Son of Man becomes the King of Kings. Myth has replaced history. A study of the texts and content of popular preaching, of such popular literature as remains, and of the religious activities of the period show that by the fifth

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century almost all contact with the New Testament or any sense of the historicity of Jesus has disappeared.

With this neglect of history goes inevitably a tendency to divorce religion from life. Christianity in its earliest days had been "the Way": to be "in Christ" was to be a "new creation,"—"the old had passed away; all things were become new; but all things were of God" as St. Paul had declared.<sup>1</sup> Men found themselves living in the world joyously and romantically just because they were living with God as workers together with Him. In consequence the common things of daily life took on a new meaning and dignity: they were to be received with contentment and used for God's glory. Where they were evil or degrading, the disciple, conscious of the presence of Christ, living for His service and upheld by the fellowship of the Church, would find himself quick to discern and constrained to reject them. But the evil lay not in the things themselves but in man's misuse of them; and those who so misused them were objects of compassion and of effort to win them, not of hatred or contempt. So long as the sense of God's presence in history remained love was

"made wise

To trace love's faint beginnings in mankind,  
To know even hate is but a mask of love's,  
To see a good in evil, and a hope  
In ill-success; to sympathise, be proud  
Of their half-reasons, faint aspirings, dim  
Struggles for truth."<sup>2</sup>

Some day the secret of this new life would be universally

<sup>1</sup>2 Cor. v. 17, 18.

<sup>2</sup>Browning, *Paracelsus*, Part IV.



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known. Some day men would come to the knowledge of the truth; and the kingdoms of this world would become the kingdom of God and of His Christ. In that hope, founded upon God's act in His Son and revealing that all history was the working-out of His purpose, men could live with zest: the meek could already possess the earth. The kingdom was not yet fully come: when it came, it would transform the whole order and bring this age to an end. But meanwhile in a real sense they were within it; and sooner or later the end was sure: for God was God, and their times were in His hand.

Such men, as the Apostolic writings and indeed the early life of the Church abundantly testify, possess and radiate power. They are themselves full-grown, integrated, well-adjusted to their environment and able to control it; for they are consciously living within a historical process which is itself unified by the presence of God, organic as intimately related to Him, dynamic because responsive to His purpose. Hence come their spontaneity and creativeness: they can face their problems as they arise and solve them not by reference to external standards of rule or precedent but in the immediate light of an experience which makes them sensitive both to God and to their fellows: they are members in a body, finding freedom in its service, freedom which is at once release from self and energy for experiment and growth.

As this sense of the value of nature and history is lost, so the whole quality of Christianity is changed. Taking the evidence in bulk and not allowing ourselves to be over-influenced by individual cases, we can trace with some accuracy the curve of decline. By the beginning of the third century it is noticeable; by its close it has become rapid. During the fourth, which if it was the "great age"

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of the Fathers was also the great age of distortion, it is doubtful whether we ought to say that the Church conquered the world or that the world invaded and subdued the Church. In any case the Church was grievously altered. If we look at a typical representative of the age we shall be able to gauge the extent of the alteration more exactly than by generalisations.

Jerome,<sup>1</sup> peculiar as he is in his temper and his learning, is probably the best example for our purpose. He is not so wrapped up in study as to be lacking in human interests and vigour: indeed his letters are among the most racy and readable of all early writings. He is not metaphysically minded or naturally speculative: his concern is with present events, conduct and knowledge. He was in touch with most of the leading personages of his day, even if his contact was generally critical or quarrelsome. His influence, if not so great as he wished in his life-time, was unrivalled for the centuries that followed. If he is a man of his own age, he embodies and foreshadows the very essence of later churchmanship. Moreover his great work as the creator of the Vulgate ought to have given him a sense of history which doctrinal theologians might be excused for not sharing. To compare his letters with those of St. Paul gives a just picture of the contrast between the beginning and the end of the Patristic age.

Jerome is a canonised saint—and a saint of considerable popularity: he and his lion and even his cardinal's hat are familiar to every art-student. It may seem strange to say that the first impression of him is of one almost wholly devoid of religion or of any Christian experience. He is not concerned with God except to protest with a passionate

<sup>1</sup>For the English reader there is a competent version of his chief works in the *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. VI.

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horror against the "unheard of doctrine of three Hypostases"<sup>1</sup>—a formula which was by this time usual in the Greek-speaking churches. Nor has he any sense of the historical reality or living presence of Christ: words in the same letter to the Pope "I follow no leader save Christ, therefore I communicate with none save your holiness, that is with the chair of Peter"<sup>2</sup> represent his nearest approach to such a sense: Christ is the ultimate source of authority, the ultimate object of worship; but all that St. Paul meant by "in Christ" is meaningless to him. Of the Holy Spirit apart from formal recognition of His work in baptism<sup>3</sup> there is hardly any mention. Considering that Jerome lived during a period of intense theological debate and was himself present at the Council of Constantinople it is surprising that even if he had no interest in God on the religious side he should have been equally unconcerned on the doctrinal.

If there is no sign of any love or indeed any conscious awareness of God or of Christ, there is a vast concern over his own orthodoxy. Any suggestion of departure from rigid conformity sends him into a frenzy; and the subsequent controversies are a splutter of invective.<sup>4</sup> It is not that he is concerned so much with the truth as that anyone should dare to impute to him opinions which will endanger his reputation. Of heretics he has a horror almost as great as his friend Epiphanius: they are "madmen" filthy, venomous, the worst of sinners,<sup>5</sup> doomed like every

<sup>1</sup>*Ep.* 15, 3, to Pope Damasus.

<sup>2</sup>*l.c.* 2.

<sup>3</sup>*Ep.* 69, 6.

<sup>4</sup>*cf.* his dealings with Rufinus, once his friend, who having referred to Jerome as an admirer of Origen was assailed bitterly and continuously as "pig" during his lifetime and "scorpion" after his death) *Pref. in Jerem.* 1, *in Ezech.* 1, *in Isa.* 10, etc.): his worst tirade being in a section headed "never speak evil of others," *Ep.* 125, 18.

<sup>5</sup>*Dial. c. Pelag.* I, 28.

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unbaptised soul to hell:<sup>1</sup> but here again it is less the content of their teaching that offends him than that they do not conform to the views which authority imposes and he is qualified to expound. Few men have ever been more proud of their own status and learning—"men thought me worthy of the papacy, they called me holy, humble, eloquent"<sup>2</sup>—or more sensitive to criticism—"I could only escape by writing nothing."<sup>3</sup> The combination makes him singularly unoriginal: his commentaries are little more than compilations and his scholarship is as cautious as it is pedantic. If a thing is pious and popular, be it relic-worship or pilgrimage, vigil or squalor, he will be its enthusiastic champion; if anyone dares to question it, the tirades against Jovinian and Vigilantius show what they must expect. We have already pointed out one main cause of his attitude in drawing attention to his estimate of sex: on that subject he is hardly sane; and the obsession with him as with his contemporaries infected his whole life and thought. But it is plain that his scorn of history is hardly less responsible. He is a scholar: he knows his Bible from cover to cover: his translation of it is one of the great achievements of churchmen. Yet he can deliberately expound the *Song of Songs* not, as Origen had done, as an allegory of Christ and the soul, but, fantastic as it may appear, as a hymn in honour of virginity.<sup>4</sup> His exegesis is a curious mixture of sound knowledge<sup>5</sup> and of allegorising, but is always subservient to his prejudices. Thus his treatment of the brethren of our Lord to which reference has already been made is paralleled by the

<sup>1</sup>cf. *Ep.* 23, 3, of the consul-elect.

<sup>2</sup>*Ep.* 45, 3.

<sup>3</sup>*Ep.* 52, 17.

<sup>4</sup>c. *Jovin* 1, 30.

<sup>5</sup>e.g., his comments upon texts quoted in the Gospels (Matt. ii. 13-15; xxvii. 9, 10; Mark i. 1-3, etc.) are very astute, cf. *Ep.* 57, 7-9.

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theory, which brought him into a quarrel with Augustine, that the dispute between St. Paul and St. Peter in *Galatians* II was feigned in order that their respective points of view, each proper in itself, might be presented to the Church—a theory which as his critic observed impugns the veracity both of the Apostles and of Scripture.<sup>1</sup> He is entirely lacking in that sense of the importance of an author's personal equation, circumstances and language which we find in Theodore of Mopsuestia; and as he has no metaphysical system to take its place, his teaching is determined and coloured only by his own conventional and rather superstitious outlook. He gave his age what it was eager to receive, but the result is very unlike the Apostolic *kerygma*.

In the Brussels Museum there is a picture by Rubens which reveals the full and terrible extent of the change, the picture of St. Francis saving the world from the wrath of Christ. Huddled over the globe in the foreground crouches the little poor man of Assisi, sheltering it with his cloak. Above him thrusting aside His pitying Mother stands the Christ, armed like Zeus against the Titans with the thunder-bolt and with pierced hand outstretched in act to throw—Christ lusting for vengeance, Christ thwarted by the heroic compassion of His saint. The mind that could conceive, the age that could tolerate such a blasphemy do not, alas, stand alone. They are the outcome, the logical outcome of the process that we have been considering, when that process had been endorsed and carried to its conclusion by a Church distorted in the same fashion.

<sup>1</sup>*Pref. in Galat. i., cf. Augustine Ep. 28.*

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**H**ITHERTO we have been dealing with changes which, however regrettable, were natural, indeed inevitable in the process of growth. That Christ transcends the measure of our apprehension, and that consequently the interpreter should fail to do full justice to the measure of His stature, is a necessary conviction for those who acknowledge His divinity: that the interpretations should be distorted by the outlook and circumstances of teachers and hearers, is equally a truism. We have tried to show that the results were due more to concentration upon particular issues and a consequent loss of proportion than to blindness or conscious perversion. To attain and present a complete experience of Christ would only be possible if the gospel were a small and human thing. If it is the Word of God, then the best of saints can only approximate to it, and even so in meeting the challenge of a special need will be constrained to select and emphasise the aspect of the revelation appropriate to the issue immediately at stake: and this involves an obscuring of the scope and consistency of the whole.

This difficulty of combining a demand for perfection with the necessity for a step-by-step response to it is inherent in the Christian's task. It is indeed no small

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part of the uniqueness of Jesus that He both laid upon man an absolute obligation, an obligation which none can fulfil, and yet related this claim for total and revolutionary change to the concrete and immediate and infinitely varied circumstances of each separate individual, by applying it to the special task of the moment. To hold uncompromisingly to the full gospel and yet to work it out in a series of partial and conditioned responses without either losing sight of the whole or being reduced to impotence by the contrast between the whole and its parts is an undertaking which all must attempt and in which none, humanly speaking, can succeed—a conclusion which would seem to reduce all discipleship, indeed all human effort, to futility if it were not that the very essence of life on earth is precisely this “quest of the horizon,” this effort to live eternally in a world of time. We who see in our own day the danger of identifying Christianity with individual salvation or with garden cities, with the realisation of value or the abstention from war, and who see not less plainly that a demand for repentance, unaccompanied by reference to precise and practical problems, is illusory and Utopian, ought to judge very gently, ought not to judge but to appreciate, the distortions which our predecessors, committed to the same adventure, introduced into the faith.

If the changes that we have been considering had taken place in a period during which the life of the Church was continuously plastic and adaptable, it is probable that they would have given place to other tendencies which would have counteracted their effects. Mankind especially in the West has an interest in the nature and history of the world far too deep-seated to be

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long forgotten. The practicality of Europeans, springing as it does from the conditions under which they live, has never been favourable to religions of escape: neither moral detachment nor metaphysical speculation are congenial to them. The Church which under the special circumstances of the third and fourth centuries debased its original valuation of nature and history might have passed on readily to a recovery of proportion if its powers of adjustment had remained elastic. Lop-sided growth in one period would have been corrected as other sides were brought into activity under the stimulus of fresh needs. A living organism passes through many phases of development before reaching maturity; and in some of them it may appear to have lost the use of functions essential to its perfection. Only if normal growth is arrested and a temporary and distorted phase becomes fixed, need exaggeration be regarded as dangerous. But Bergson's warning of the fate of the lobster, which for the sake of immunity got itself into a coat of mail and has stayed in its prison ever since, is relevant to all organic life.

To understand the persistence of the Church's distortion in regard to nature and history—a distortion which is still evident—we must take into account another condition of its early period, the fixing and form of its organised structure. For it was due to the rapid crystallising of Christian institutions and to the shape in which they were precipitated that what should have been transitory stages of belief became part of the definite outlook and tradition of the Church. Circumstances here as in the other events that we have been considering played their part and led to exaggerations out of keeping with the Apostolic *kerygma*.



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The gospel is a message of fellowship. The method of Jesus was to select and train a group: the response to it was the community of the Pentecostal Church. There is no need to stress the plain fact that there is, strictly speaking, no such thing as individual salvation, that *agape* implies *koinonia*, and that the Church is essential to Christianity. But it remains necessary to insist that this does not justify us in assuming that the earliest community was similar either in spirit or in form to the Church as we know it or in reading, as we too often do, its history in the light of what followed. In the New Testament, though there is a continuous stress upon the organic unity of believers and even an individualist like St. Paul constantly directs his impulses by reference to "the mind of Christ" and "the edifying of the body," there is very little allusion to organisation; and that little is difficult to interpret. Jesus chose "the Twelve"<sup>1</sup> a number appropriate to the new Israel:<sup>2</sup> they are called Apostles, but the term denotes function<sup>3</sup> rather than office and is applied to many outside the twelve.<sup>4</sup> Then for a special and temporary duty at Jerusalem the Seven are appointed:<sup>5</sup> traditionally, but not in the New Testament, they are styled deacons and presumed to have initiated the order. Shortly afterwards the church at Jerusalem seems to have been directed by elders;<sup>6</sup> and St. Paul is described in Acts<sup>7</sup> as appointing elders in the Galatian churches and summoning elders from Ephesus—though in his own Epistles the word never

<sup>1</sup>Mark iii. 14, 16, etc.

<sup>2</sup>Matt. xix. 28.

<sup>3</sup>cf. Mark iii. 15; Acts i. 25.

<sup>4</sup>Acts xiv. 14; Gal. i. 19; 2 Cor. viii. 23; Phil. ii. 25.

<sup>5</sup>Acts vi. 3-6.

<sup>6</sup>Acts xi. 30; xv. 2, etc., cf. also James v. 14; 1 Peter v. 1.

<sup>7</sup>xiv. 23 and xx. 17.

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occurs except in the Pastorals where it is interchangeable with bishop.<sup>1</sup> This latter and the word deacon are used so vaguely<sup>2</sup> as to raise a doubt whether in Apostolic times they were appropriated to special officers at all; and this doubt is increased by the absence of them both in the lists of offices<sup>3</sup> and gifts.<sup>4</sup> The only passages that suggest definite status are in the opening sentence to the Philippians "bishops and deacons"<sup>5</sup> and in the Pastorals—and the latter are almost certainly not Pauline. No doubt the churches had their leaders; and the most important of these, next to the Apostles, would seem to be the prophets and teachers: but the evidence does not indicate that these had clearly defined status or specified functions, and is not strong enough to validate the many ingenious theories which suppose that the earliest *ecclesia* was modelled upon the synagogue or the Greek guilds or the Roman *sodalicia* and burial clubs. The picture is of communities whose life is organic rather than organised.

In such communities, integrated by a common loyalty and inspired by a common purpose, there is developed an immediate apprehension of adjustments necessary for putting loyalty and purpose into effect. The society becomes a single organism in which the component individuals are as responsive to the corporate will as are the limbs in a body. The Pauline and Johannine metaphors in such a case are true descriptions of a real

<sup>1</sup>1 Tim. iii. 1-13; Tit. i. 5-9.

<sup>2</sup>e.g., 1 Peter ii. 25; Acts i. 20; xx. 28 of bishop; Acts i. 25; vi. 4; 1 Cor. iii. 5; 2 Cor. iii. 6; xi. 23; Col. i. 23, 25; Eph. iii. 7; 1 Tim. iv. 6 of deacon.

<sup>3</sup>Eph. iv. 11.

<sup>4</sup>1 Cor. xii. 7-10. In Rom. xii. 6-8 *διακονία* occurs but the list is of activities not offices.

<sup>5</sup>Phil. i. 1 with which cf. *διακονία καὶ ἀποστολή*, Acts i. 25.

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experience: for the Church in "the fellowship of the Holy Spirit" derived from the gracious gift of Christ and the manifested love of God<sup>1</sup> just this quality of organic and dynamic vitality. Its response to its environment was spontaneous, unhesitating and appropriate. If "healthy organisms think not of their processes but of their ends," the Church in the wholeness and harmony of its early days was not concerned with exact definition of the function of its several members, still less with rules and precedents. Situations arose and were dealt with "not by law," not by logical process or settled procedure, "but by grace," by sensitive perception of the mind of Christ and of the purpose to which His mind was set. Those who possessed particular gifts whose exercise was of value to the body were encouraged to use them, apparently without any authorisation save the support of the congregation or any supervision except the test of fruits.

Such organic life demands a quality of faith, that is of active loyalty, hard to achieve or sustain. Congregations were liable to ignore one or other of the twin points controlling their actions. Either they expressed their fellowship in ways inconsistent with the mind of Christ or in their zeal for spiritual excitement they forgot the edification of the body. Thus the Galatians accepted the obligations of the Mosaic Law in the desire to give a more precise and ordered expression to their fellowship;<sup>2</sup> and the Corinthians let their emotional fervour carry them into excesses of unedifying excitement.<sup>3</sup> But in each case and indeed in all his genuine letters St. Paul deals with such errors not by legislation or the setting up of

<sup>1</sup> 2 Cor. xiii. 13.

<sup>2</sup> cf. Gal. iv. 19, 20; vi. 11-3.

<sup>3</sup> 1 Cor. xii. 29-xiii. 1; xiv.

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machinery, but by personal influence, warning, pleading, advising, exhorting. It is only in the least authentic sections of the Pastoral Epistles that the problems of discipline and supervision are considered in terms of organisation.

Even so the temptation to draw a sharp contrast between charismatic and institutional types of ministry must be resisted; for it implies a misconception of the relationship inherent in the Apostolic *kerygma* between the Spirit and His embodiment. Accepting God's action in the Son of Man the Early Church saw no such antithesis between divine and human either in Christ or in the Christian community. If even in the New Testament there is a tendency to exaggerate the spiritual value of ecstatic experiences, there is constant evidence that the proper response to the Spirit included the whole man, his reason and conscience and actions not less than his emotions. This as St. Paul<sup>1</sup> saw was not to nullify law but to fulfil it by transforming the motive and personalising the quality of obedience. Love, so regarded, is no longer complementary to justice: for love includes righteousness and lays a constraint stronger than that of any law upon those who live by it. It is only when love—*agape*—is degraded into a mere sentimentality that an antithesis between love and justice obtrudes itself. While *agape* and *koinonia* are given their full significance, opposition between an institutional and a charismatic ministry is unthinkable: the community acts in response to the Spirit by the appropriate means: organisation becomes itself a process of the organism.

In such a community the individual can live at a fully

<sup>1</sup>cf. Rom. iii. 31, etc.

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personal level, live as he lives with his friends or family in the subtle and spontaneous intercourse of a gracious communion with God and the brethren which St. Paul so constantly contrasts with the formal, regulated and conventional behaviour of those who are "under law." "Law" as he regards it involves a self-conscious obedience to a discipline imposed from without, to rules and customs and precedents which inevitably foster insincerity and provoke rebellion, since they compel a person to live and act on a sub-personal level. The conflict between the spirit and the flesh which he describes so vividly is psychologically the conflict within the ill-adjusted and unintegrated personality—a conflict which only faith or active loyalty to a person can resolve. The gospel in Pauline thought has a supreme regenerative value precisely because it frees a man from this conflict, integrates and sublimates his personality and so releases in him the power, previously wasted over inward friction, to adjust himself to his environment and gain the mastery of circumstance. Henceforward he is no longer the "slave of sin" "at the mercy of the winds and waves,"<sup>1</sup> but is free to live as the child of God in the fellowship of his brethren, "speaking truth in love."<sup>2</sup> We who are to-day beginning to realise the radical difference between the personal and sub-personal levels of conduct find our convictions expressed in the familiar contrasts—faith, grace, life; law, sin, death.

To maintain such a level of personal relationships makes demands upon the individual which may well seem wholly unattainable. Human nature, as we are inclined to insist in the light of our own painful exper-

<sup>1</sup>Rom. vi. 15-23 and Eph. iv. 14.

<sup>2</sup>Rom. viii. 12-13 and Eph. iv. 15.

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ience of it, is not capable of so complete a sublimation of its selfish and anti-social instincts. Our animal heritage, our native and primary urge for self-preservation, the ingrained effects of ages of struggle and fear and the present necessity of maintaining ourselves in a world of conflicting and unregenerate forces, forbid us to accept the possibility of such a transformation. We cannot lay aside the armour that protects us against our fellows, or dispense with the power to coerce and regulate and mechanise society, or expose our sensitiveness to the malice and exploitation of our enemies. To do so would be to give license to the oppressor and encourage moral anarchy. The sort of Church that this picture presents could only exist in Utopia; and we are dwellers upon earth.

It is noticeable that even St. Paul recognised the force of such objections and when meeting the charge of antinomianism is well aware of the risk that his gospel involves. How are these unruly and half-instructed converts of his to be saved from turning their liberty into licentiousness? Can they dispense with the leading-strings of law and walk freely so as to fulfil its demands when the support of its compulsion and minute instructions is withdrawn? Will they not miss the road and fall an easy prey to their own lusts?<sup>1</sup> Here are the crucial questions by which his life's work will be tested: if his gospel is true the answer will be clear and decisive. That he was conscious of the issues at stake is plain from the note of intensity, almost of nervousness, that is evident whenever he deals with it.<sup>2</sup> But his own experience, indeed the gospel itself, convinces him that the

<sup>1</sup>Rom. vi. 15.

<sup>2</sup>e.g., Gal. iv. 11; Rom. vi. 1, etc.

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slaves of law can become the slaves of God and of the brotherhood,<sup>1</sup> that the new age has begun and that man must live in it here and now without compromise: "else Christ has died for nought."<sup>2</sup>

That his anxiety was not ill-founded was proved by events. Already in the Pastoral Epistles there is evidence of a change in the attitude of believers towards Christ<sup>3</sup> and of a concern for precedent ("hold fast the tradition"<sup>4</sup>) and for orthodoxy of belief and conduct ("the form of sound words" and "the good tradition"<sup>5</sup>) which more even than the insistence on administrative regulations is out of keeping with their Pauline authorship. While he was alive, his own personal efforts could sustain the level of life in his churches. After his death no element in his teaching was more quickly allowed to fall into abeyance. Law, traditions, authorities, precedents, recovered their position, until it almost seemed as if the great struggle of his life had been fought in vain.

The very fact that Christianity drew its origin from an historic life and that this life was the standard of reference for future developments, made necessary a certain backward look. Apostles and eye-witnesses might realise that the Jesus of the ministry and the Christ of their later experience were one and the same. St. Paul might insist that he cares not to know Christ after the flesh<sup>6</sup> because he is continuously in communion with Him after the spirit. But with the passing of the first disciples a fixing of the historical records became essential; the Gospel

<sup>1</sup>Gal. v. 13; Rom. vi. 18; vii. 6, etc.

<sup>2</sup>Gal. ii. 21.

<sup>3</sup>*εὐσεβεία* replaces *πίστις*, cf. Falconer, *Pastoral Epistles*, pp. 30-9.

<sup>4</sup>1 Tim. vi. 20.

<sup>5</sup>2 Tim. i. 13.

<sup>6</sup>2 Cor. v. 16.

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tradition was established; and its authority tended to become that of the letter<sup>1</sup> and to take on a legal character. The "new covenant" began to be assimilated to the "old."

This process was greatly accelerated by the influence which the Old Testament acquired in the Sub-Apostolic Church. The use of its oracles or *testimonia* and of the argument from prophecy gave it a sanctity which Marcion's protest was powerless to diminish. The importance given to it by the recital of the psalter<sup>2</sup> and of passages from it as lessons in Christian worship was at this time not corrected by any canticles or readings from the New Testament, except perhaps an occasional epistle; for the New Testament was not yet either collected or accounted scriptural. The modelling of the Christian communities upon the pattern of the synagogue and of ethical standards upon the Law stressed the debt of the Church to Judaism and blunted the sense of contrast which St. Paul had so vividly realised. There can be little doubt that these influences go far to account for the disappearance of the Pauline communities in the century that followed his death and for the failure of Christians to reap the fruits of his conflict against legalism. He had not altogether failed: his struggle for the inclusion of Gentiles and for the rejection of circumcision and the ceremonial law had ended in an enduring victory: when the fall of Jerusalem made it impossible to regard the Christians as a Jewish sect, the Church was ready to stand alone: as between himself and St. James the issue was decided in his favour, and the Judaizers sank into obscurity and heresy.

<sup>1</sup>cf. Rom. ii. 29; vii. 6; 2 Cor. iii. 6 for St. Paul's warnings against this danger.

<sup>2</sup>cf. Swete, *Church Services and Service-books*, p. 42; Burkitt, *Christian Worship*, pp. 24-5, etc.



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But if on the negative side he succeeded, on the positive events were too strong for him. If he saved Christendom from relapsing into Judaism, he did not save it from legalism, authoritarianism and the organisation of its life on a sub-personal level.

• It is not necessary to enter here into a discussion of the precise stages by which the institutional system, generally accepted by the end of the second century, came into being. To do so would be to reopen the question of the date and provenance of the *Didache*, to examine in detail the familiar but highly controversial evidence as to episcopacy and to cover once again the ground surveyed by Streeter in a book<sup>1</sup> which though open to much criticism on points of individual speculation is nevertheless valid as a picture of the experiments and development of the Sub-Apostolic age. It can hardly be disputed that here as in the formulation of doctrine there was at first wide variety, that then under the pressure of particular needs definite tendencies asserted themselves, and that these were accepted or rejected by a natural process of adaptation to the prevailing environment rather than in accordance with a clearly foreseen design. There is really no evidence to support the view that the monarchical episcopate or still less the papacy was initiated by the Apostles or necessarily inherent in the original character of the Church: indeed there is definite proof that this was not the case. Rather these developments were due to special circumstances, commended themselves by their utility and so won gradual but not unchallenged authority. Unless we are prepared to identify the course of events with the will of God there is no justification for treating them as sacrosanct and irreformable: they may well

<sup>1</sup>*The Primitive Church.*

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be exaggerations or even perversions appropriate for a time but inconsistent with the true nature of the *kerygma* and of the Church.

Instead of a discussion of details, familiar in themselves and highly controversial, we will consider the main influences which affected the institutionalising of Christianity and transformed the primitive community into the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church of the fifth century.

It is hardly necessary even to mention the obvious necessity for replacing the work of the Apostles in expounding the message, guiding and supervising the little communities and maintaining links between them, nor to point out the dangers which with their passing had to be faced and overcome. The whole Christian movement might easily have disintegrated, its doctrines becoming syncretistic and diverse, its groups anarchic and isolated. Some would have been re-absorbed into Judaism; others caught into the widespread and polymorphic sects of Gnosticism; others as the witness to the historic Jesus faded, assimilated to Mithraism; others dying out in loneliness and eccentricity. That is a possibility which ought not to be ignored by those who deplore the institutionalising of religion and compare, as the honest student must, the fervour, power and freedom of the early days with the laxity, formality and legalism that followed. As numbers increased, difficulties from disunion within and persecution without were inevitable. Even if the strong corporate life of new and small communities could have been sustained, the time was bound to come when visiting supervisors could no longer deal with all the problems and emergencies that arose. A local organisation, appropriately constituted

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and regularly appointed, was essential, if there were to be any unanimity of teaching and maintenance of order, any rallying point in times of oppression, any co-operation between one place and another. St. Paul's letters give a vivid picture of the variety and intricacy of the daily tasks which the care of the churches laid upon him: his labours prove that those tasks could not long have been discharged by a travelling apostolate. Structure of some sort was essential. Circumstances determined the particular form which it assumed.

The first of these circumstances is found in the type of social organisation prevalent at the time. We have already urged that the evidence in the New Testament is not sufficient to warrant us in assuming that in the Apostolic age definite signs of the adoption of such organisation can be found. The elders and their president<sup>1</sup> at Jerusalem furnish the clearest sign of this sort: for government by elders and sheikhs was characteristic of the local government of Israel as it still is of Arabia. It is possible that the gentile churches even in St. Paul's time were beginning to follow the example of similar societies in their own localities, that the school of Tyrannus<sup>2</sup> at Ephesus was the meeting-place of a "college" which put it at the Apostle's disposal; that the references to presidents<sup>3</sup> point to influential persons who acted as *patroni* to the church as they did to the colleges; that the first bishops are analogous to their quæstors or treasurers; and that the common meal described in I Corinthians<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup>St. James is not styled bishop until Clement Alex. (*ap.* Eusebius *H.E.* II, 1,) but Hegesippus speaks of Symeon as succeeding him as bishop (*H.E.* IV, 22). For his status cf. Mackinnon, *From Christ to Constantine*, pp. 86-8.

<sup>2</sup>Acts xix. 9.

<sup>3</sup>Rom. xii. 8; 1 Thess. v. 12; 3 Jn. 9.

<sup>4</sup>1 Cor. xi. 20-2.

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is based rather upon their dinners than upon the Last Supper. These are speculations for which Hatch<sup>1</sup> has made at least a plausible case. They can hardly be regarded as proven.<sup>2</sup>

But in the developments of the next century the constitution of these colleges certainly exerted an influence; and that from this main cause. Associations<sup>3</sup> of all sorts for religious, social, industrial, beneficent, funerary and political purposes had existed from time immemorial in the Græco-Roman world, chiefly but not exclusively among the classes debarred from any share in government or in the interests and activities of the aristocracy. The historians of antiquity tell us almost nothing of the life of the common people, of the mass of middle-class folk, farmers and traders, artisans and seamen, and still less of the slaves and ex-slaves upon whose toil the social fabric rested. These found in their clubs what their modern representatives find in the lodges of the Friendly Societies or the branches of the Trade Unions, in Co-operative Guilds or the Workers' Educational Association, a means to sociability and mutual help. In the Christian era when social evils were intensified and the gulf between wealth and poverty was widening, such colleges became universal and immensely numerous. Attempts had been made even in Republican days to suppress them; for the horrors of the Slave War had bitten deep into Roman life, and any association lent itself to political agitation. The emperors did their best to forbid them, as Trajan's correspondence with Pliny in Bithynia proves.

<sup>1</sup>*The Organization of the Early Christian Churches.*

<sup>2</sup>For criticism cf. J. Armitage Robinson, Article "Bishop" in *Encycl. Biblica*.

<sup>3</sup>An admirable if somewhat repetitive account of these is given by Dill, *Roman Society from Nero to M. Aurelius*, pp. 251 ff.

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But in fact wholesale prohibition was impossible and it was found wiser to regulate than to repress. An inscription at Lanuvium<sup>1</sup> of the year A.D. 136 quotes the decree of the Senate which allowed a college to meet monthly for the collection of its subscriptions; and meetings on other occasions, provided they dealt with the legitimate objects of the society, were not interfered with. Colleges were named after a tutelary deity and had usually as one of their tasks the provision of funeral rites for their members. They were thus regarded as religious in character; and Rome was tolerant of religion. Some of them like the guilds in Greece had a genuine as compared with a formal religious motive. They varied greatly in character,<sup>2</sup> and to some of them the Church presented a close legal analogy.

When the Church lost the shelter of its connection with Judaism and could no longer be regarded as a national and therefore legalised cult, the measure of protection afforded to the colleges naturally commended itself to the Christians. Pliny<sup>3</sup> describes how in obeying the Emperor's instructions to inquire into the clubs in his province he had been brought into contact with the Christians: it is a probable inference that in Bithynia they were officially recognised as in some sense a "college," and clear that they regarded themselves as such.<sup>4</sup> So too in Rome their tenure of the catacombs, though no doubt due in the first case to the generosity of private landowners, must have been authorised on the ground

<sup>1</sup>*Or. Henz.* 6086 (in *Dill l.c.*, pp. 255, 260-1).

<sup>2</sup>Batiffol, *Primitive Catholicism*, pp. 33-6, arguing against Hatch, De Rossi and Duchesne, ignores the distinction between different types of college or association. Nor does he provide any alternative theory as to the status of the Church in the eyes of the law.

<sup>3</sup>*Ep.* x. 96, cf. Hatch *l.c.*, p. 31.

<sup>4</sup>cf. Batiffol *l.c.*, p. 23n.

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that they were legally a burial-club; and Hippolytus's<sup>1</sup> bitter story of the misdeeds of his rival Callistus gives the strong impression that the Church at that time had a legal status, precarious if strict inquiry were made (for their religion was not recognised as such), but sufficient to cover them in the eyes of a magistrate who was prepared to put them on a level with other such associations.

Clear proof that this is the case is contained in Tertullian's *Apology*.<sup>2</sup> Whether or no he was a lawyer in his use of theological terms,<sup>3</sup> his procedure in defending the Christians is to give legal evidence, first that they do not deserve condemnation on general grounds, and then that it is just to give them a place among the legally recognised clubs; for such clubs are only prohibited when they have a seditious and political character. With this purpose he sets out in detail the basis on which such recognition is and ought to be given. The Christian corporation meets for a religious purpose. Approved elders preside over it. Contributions are collected monthly and are voluntary. They are used to relieve and to bury the poor, to help orphans and the aged, the shipwrecked and the prisoners—that is for the charitable purposes proper to a "college"—and administered as an act of brotherhood. There is a common meal, but of a simple kind, neither luxurious nor costly: its name, *agape*, expresses its character: it benefits the needy and is itself a religious rite: it begins and ends with prayer, and the company breaks up quietly. None of the complaints

<sup>1</sup>*Refut.* ix. 7. Zephyrinus is said to have used Callistus for the supervision of clergy, that is as archdeacon, and to have put him in charge of the catacomb now called by his name.

<sup>2</sup>§§ 38-9.

<sup>3</sup>Prestige, *God in Patristic Thought*, pp. 97, 221, disputes this but cf. Eusebius *H.E.* II, 2.

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alleged against the clubs applies to the Christians. His argument does not explicitly state that he is pleading for the continuance of a privilege already granted; but its form and content show clearly that this was the position: the Christians could be regarded as a club or *factio*; their objects and methods prove that as such they belong not to the illegal and seditious but to the religious and beneficent and therefore legalised type of association.<sup>1</sup>

The position thus secured supplies the answer to the strange anomaly that we find throughout the third century. If the authorities imperial or local were tolerant, they could treat the local church as entitled to the limited privileges of the "colleges": it could as such hold meetings, own and use buildings, and receive money. But at any time hostile officials could raise the charge that the name and character of the Christian "college" put it outside the scope of legal protection; and persecution "for the name" might break out without any legal process, buildings be confiscated, meetings banned and members arrested. Aurelian's attitude in relation to Paul of Samosata at Antioch in A.D. 269<sup>2</sup> is typical of what a not unfriendly emperor could do. He did not, as has sometimes been supposed, give a new legality to the Church; he merely decided that the property of this "college" must be handed over to the representatives whom its leading authority, the bishops of Italy and Rome, approved.

This connection with the colleges must have been largely responsible for determining the form of organisation which became almost universal by the middle of the second century. Varied as these colleges were, they all

<sup>1</sup>cf. Duchesne, *Hist. Ancienne de l'Eglise*, I, pp. 383-4.

<sup>2</sup>Eusebius *H.E.*, VII, 30.

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possessed a similar type of constitution, modelled upon that of the city and municipality. At the head was a master or president (the titles of the officer are many) who was appointed either annually or for life. With him was a senate or council of duly appointed members, responsible for carrying on the business. In addition there were officers specially charged with the collection and administration of finance. These are the three universal and constant features of the constitution. In particular colleges other officials of a subordinate character might exist, entrusted with special functions. The membership was graded, generally on lines of its social status, the slaves being normally in a subordinate position. If as seems clear from the Epistle of Clement of Rome<sup>1</sup> the churches of the Sub-Apostolic age had in general only a council of representatives, the presbyter-bishops, and subordinate ministers or deacons charged with the collection and distribution of relief, it was natural that the precedent of the colleges, meeting the need for unity of leadership, should have commended the monarchical episcopate as appropriate; for in colleges of a religious character as in that at Philippi<sup>2</sup> the president was the priest. The minor orders as they were gradually created would follow similar precedents, and the sharp line drawn between the various grades of membership, penitents, energumens, catechumens, and communicants was also in harmony with the practice of the colleges. It is not suggested that the structure of the Church was deliberately or even consciously an imitation: but when men are familiar with a definite type of constitution for bodies analogous to their own, the tendency to

<sup>1</sup>cf. Lightfoot in *Ep. to Philippians*, pp. 216, 218.

<sup>2</sup>*C.I.L.*, III, 1, 633 (Dill l.c., p. 272).



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follow it is natural and compelling. That the churches so rapidly and in the main so universally adopted the three-fold ministry, the minor orders, and the division of the laity into categories is due less to consultation between leaders or a desire for uniformity than to the fact that such arrangements were common to associations of every kind.

If the general structure of the Church's organisation was influenced by the "colleges," another characteristic feature of the age promoted the same line of development and determined certain details of the process. If Christianity in the eyes of the law was a burial-club, in the eyes of the average man it was a mystery-religion.

It is unnecessary to repeat the story of the invasion of the Roman world by these Eastern cults which already at Eleusis and elsewhere in Greece had their indigenous representatives. From the coming of Cybele, the *Magna Mater*, the Phrygian goddess, to Rome in 204 B.C. to the time when Isis-worship captivated the fashionable ladies of the Augustan age or Mithra won the allegiance of the soldiery and had his chapel in every garrison, the influence of the mysteries permeated and seemed likely to dominate the religious life of the Empire. At first scorned as alien, vulgar and degrading, they won their way to the palace under Elgabal and his less unpleasant successor, during the third century were the acknowledged rivals of Christianity, and under Constantine might easily (so it seems) have secured the place which after A.D.313 he gave to the Church. That the danger, particularly from Mithraism, was recognised, is plain from the note of animosity which sounds in all the Christian references to them. The old paganism whether of Italy or

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of Olympus was a thing of mockery: Christian apologists could attack it with confidence. But Mithra was a deadlier opponent, a snare of Satan, a devilish parodist of the faith. Justin<sup>1</sup> and Tertullian<sup>2</sup> tell us that the evil spirits copied the Eucharist and handed it down in the mysteries of Mithra; but as they bring no evidence to support their assertions they leave it open to ask whether the copying was all on one side.

We have already dismissed the suggestion that Christianity was from the first simply a mystery religion and while claiming that St. Paul rightly saw and used the valuable elements in the mysteries to interpret Christ have maintained that in the Apostolic age there is no evidence of assimilation to them. But in the succeeding period the question becomes much more complicated—not least because knowledge of the precise development of the cults is very defective. The blood-baptisms, *taurobolium* and *criobolium*, which may originally have been derived from the Dionysiac orgies, became part of the ritual of Cybele and were apparently taken over by Mithraism, which gave too easy a welcome to borrowings from less austere rites. They have really no resemblance to the baptism of the Church whose origin is manifestly Jewish, and whose administration remained simple; nor were they connected with initiation but with lustration and sacrifice.<sup>3</sup> Purifications with water are of course common, as Tertullian<sup>4</sup> notes, in many heathen cults, but in spite of his assertion about the baptisms of Isis and Mithra it does not seem that these were initiatory, or testify to any special connection with Christianity. More

<sup>1</sup>*Apol.* i. 66.

<sup>2</sup>*De Praescr.*, 40.

<sup>3</sup>cf. Nock in *Essays on the Trinity and Incarnation*, pp. 117-9.

<sup>4</sup>*De Baptismo*, 5.

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important are the rites of the feigned death which played a chief part in the initiatory discipline<sup>1</sup> and are more likely to have affected Christian usage. That John the Baptist and the Apostolic Church regarded baptism as both a washing away of sin and an initiation into the new life seems indisputable. St. Paul indeed compares it to the death of Christ<sup>2</sup> as a prelude to resurrection; and in other writers<sup>3</sup> it is described as a rebirth; but at this stage there is no reasonable cause to suspect "mystery" influence. It is rather in the change of its name and time of administration, in the growth of magical ideas in connection with it, and in the development of its ceremonial that the example of the mysteries is traceable.<sup>4</sup>

Their influence is even more clear in the case of the Eucharist—though our ignorance of the precise character and origin of the Mithraic supper makes exact assessment of the interaction between the cults and the Church in this particular difficult. What the student of Christianity has to explain is how the simple Supper of the Lord which in Apostolic times plainly commemorated and followed the usage of the Upper Room developed into the Eucharist as described in Justin; how this in turn became the "secret" of the Mass; how the emphasis moved from the service as a whole to the moment of consecration; and how the elements acquired their peculiar and exclusive sanctity. That these changes came gradually and rather by a shifting of emphasis and proportion than at any particular moment or by definite and demonstrable alterations does not make their total

<sup>1</sup>cf. Tertullian *De Corona*, 15.

<sup>2</sup>Rom. vi. 3.

<sup>3</sup>Notably Tit. iii. 5 and Jn. iii. 5-8.

<sup>4</sup>For details cf. Hatch, *The Influence of Greek Ideas upon the Church*, pp. 294-300.

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effect less momentous. Sin, the state of separation from God, was replaced by sins, which could be catalogued, confessed and expiated: salvation ceased to be an act of faith and self-surrender to a life of love and fellowship and became an assurance of immortality gained by participation in the sacramental ordinance of the Church: eternal life which the Fourth Evangelist had defined as the knowledge of God and His Christ was now the partaking of the heavenly food of the Eucharist; the community of the Holy Spirit was identified with a highly organised hierarchical institution. No one who compares the New Testament literature with that of the fourth century can fail to notice the vast difference between them. It is not easy to find parallels between the former and the mystery religions:<sup>1</sup> in the latter the spiritual atmosphere is hardly distinguishable from them.<sup>2</sup>

Yet it would be wholly unjust to ascribe to the influence of these religions a predominant part in this change. All the circumstances which undermined the Christian valuation of nature and history tended to assimilate Christ to Mithra and to make Christianity supernatural and mythological. Even if we consider only specific religious influences the example of the cults was less effective than the development of sacrificial ideas. But that it was considerable is manifest. No one can read Cumont's *Mysteries of Mithra*, still less study the evidence on which it is based, without realising that in the third century, when Mithraism was at its zenith, the rapid development of Christian institutions and the lowering of the spiritual standard accompanying it were

<sup>1</sup>This is Nock's conclusion after careful examination of the evidence l.c., p. 128.

<sup>2</sup>cf. Hatch l.c., pp. 300-9 and particularly the quotation from Dionysius Areop.

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fostered by assimilation.<sup>1</sup> The penitential system, the division of the unbaptised into grades, the *disciplina arcana* or secrecy of the liturgy, the separation of clergy from laity, the splitting up of congregations within a city into parishes, the structure and arrangement of church sanctuaries, the dating of Christian festivals are all points in which there is evidence of "mystery" influence: both in the cultus of the Church and in its organisation the debt is manifest.

Tending in a similar direction and probably both earlier and more powerful in its influence was the identification of religion with a sacrificial system. Altar, victim, priest, these were indispensable and inseparable: in that conviction the authority of the Old Testament supported the universal practice of the Græco-Roman world.

It is indeed remarkable that the New Testament while proclaiming the sacrificial aspect of the death of Christ should so plainly abstain from the sort of language which later ages apply to the Eucharist and to the clergy. That Jesus and His disciples were in the prophetic tradition which had always criticised the priesthood and its burnt offerings,<sup>2</sup> that the synagogue was already displacing the temple in the life of Israel, and that Judaism was ready for the overthrow of the sacrificial system at the fall of Jerusalem are facts which help to explain the insistence of the author to the Hebrews that the crucifixion was the fulfilment and completion of the old order, that henceforth the sacrificing priesthood as a separate class has ceased to exist, and that all Christians are

<sup>1</sup>cf. Cumont l.c., pp. 188-199, and for the influence of the mysteries generally his *Oriental Religions in Roman Paganism*, especially pp. xxii-iii; 40-2 (penances and clergy), 202-11.

<sup>2</sup>Taylor in his recent book *Jesus and His Sacrifice*, pp. 67-71, discusses the attitude of Jesus to sacrifice. This seems to me more condemnatory than he allows.

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admitted to the privilege of priesthood, their sacrifices being good deeds and fellowship.<sup>1</sup> Though it is obviously easy to interpret the Christian experience of losing life for Christ's sake in terms of a ritual so ancient and richly symbolic as that of sacrifice,<sup>2</sup> the efforts of those who attempt to find sacrificial or priestly language in the New Testament accounts of the Lord's Supper or indeed elsewhere have been conspicuous only for their ingenuity<sup>3</sup> and special pleading.<sup>4</sup> Even in the Johannine discourses or version of the Feeding of the Five Thousand where there is the clearest approximation to later Eucharistic language, there is no sign that the elements were regarded as a sacrifice or the celebrant as a priest. "There is no sacerdotalism in the New Testament."<sup>5</sup>

Nor indeed does such language appear until the close of the second century. "Sacrifice" is indeed used, as it is not in the New Testament, in connection with the Eucharist in the *Didache*,<sup>6</sup> as is "altar" or place of sacrifice by Ignatius.<sup>7</sup> But the word refers not to the Mass but to the offerings of the faithful as is clear from Clement of Rome<sup>8</sup>—a use which is found also in St. Paul.<sup>9</sup> Hatch<sup>10</sup> who emphasises the great importance of these offerings

<sup>1</sup>Heb. xiii. 16.

<sup>2</sup>cf. Rom. xii. 1.

<sup>3</sup>e.g., the attractive conjecture that the Melchizedek story in Gen. xiv. 18-20 was accepted by Jesus and fulfilled when He took bread and wine and thus proclaimed Himself a priest: cf. Narborough in *Essays on the Trinity and Incarnation*, pp. 38-9.

<sup>4</sup>e.g., in regard to the words "Do this" Harnack, *H.D.*, I. p. 210, may be right in suggesting that *τοιαῦτα* might to a pagan mean sacrifice: it cannot be given this meaning in the N.T.

<sup>5</sup>Lightfoot in *Ep. to Philipians*, pp. 244-6.

<sup>6</sup>§14.

<sup>7</sup>*Philad.* 4; *Eph.* 5. This of course as Lightfoot shows does not refer to the Lord's Table.

<sup>8</sup>*Ep.* 44.

<sup>9</sup>*Phil.* iv. 18.

<sup>10</sup>*Organization of the Early Christian Churches*, pp. 40-54.

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which were given to the presiding bishop and by him dedicated and distributed for the poor, may exaggerate their significance when he argues that from its connection with them the episcopal office drew its importance; he is right in insisting that they were the "sacrifice," symbolic of the offering of the congregation in love, in the primitive Church. That from these offerings the bread and wine of the Eucharist were taken indicates how the transfer from them to the sacred elements took place: but this cannot be proved to have happened until the latter part of the third century and then only in the West; for though Tertullian<sup>1</sup> and Origen<sup>2</sup> both speak of the Christian minister as a priest it is in the first case with an explanation and in the second an apology, and even in Cyprian, though the use of priest is now frequent, it is as imitating what Christ the High Priest has done.<sup>3</sup> At this time the sacrifice is a memorial or representation of the one Sacrifice, and in no sense a repetition of it.<sup>4</sup>

Parallel to the change in the concept of the Eucharist is the change in the concept of its ministers. Ignatius's insistence that the bishop ought to preside is evidence that at that time this was not always the case: the service was an act of the congregation and so any member could properly celebrate it.<sup>5</sup> This was also the case in regard to baptism, where lay administration is still permitted; and to preaching, where it was allowed regularly at least until Origen's time<sup>6</sup> and under special circumstances until much later; and to discipline, since the congregation could remove its ministers freely till the

<sup>1</sup>*De Bapt.*, 17.

<sup>2</sup>*In Joh.*, i. 3.

<sup>3</sup>*Ep.* 63, 14.

<sup>4</sup>cf. Nock, l.c., p. 124.

<sup>5</sup>cf. *Philad.* 4; *Smyrn.* 8, 1, and *Hatch l.c.*, p. 118.

<sup>6</sup>cf. Eusebius *H.E.*, VI, 19.

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time of Polycarp,<sup>1</sup> and laymen shared in deciding the treatment of the lapsed in Cyprian's<sup>2</sup> day. But the primitive equality of the brethren was strange to the whole idea of religion prevailing at the time; the influence of the Old Testament made a distinct priesthood appear necessary; the laity as they increased in numbers acquiesced in the appropriation of the functions of the community to the clergy; and the protest of the Montanists which was indirectly a challenge both to the slackness of the people and to the pretensions of the priesthood failed to arrest, indeed by its extravagances accelerated, the change. After Montanism the supersession of prophesying by the Eucharist, the unifying and systematising of worship, and the segregation of the clergy as a caste proceed apace.

Along with this general need for altar and priesthood there was the tendency to centralise worship first upon the sacrament and then upon the sacred elements. The breaking of the bread had been the typical Christian "liturgy" from the first. In its various aspects, commemoration and communion, self-oblation and fellowship, it represented "the way" in its loyalty to and dependence upon Jesus, in its dedication to His service, in its corporate unity. Thus it both unified and hallowed the relationships and activities of the community; and was revered not as being solely and exclusively sacred, but as revealing and strengthening the sacredness of all Christian living. The principles expressed in it were those which should govern the Christian's outlook and attitude always and everywhere. One of the most tragic of all the distortions of the Apostolic gospel is that

<sup>1</sup>*Ad Philipp.*, II.

<sup>2</sup>*Ep.* 30.



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which came to represent the Eucharist as sacred not typically but exclusively, sacred in contra-distinction to all other sanctities, sacred no longer as including and representing all other relationships but by profaning and secularising them.

• It is obvious that the process which we have been considering led in this direction. As the sacrificial aspect became dominant, and the clergy as sacrificing priests assumed on that ground a segregated status, an importance was attached to the Eucharist which strained and went far to destroy its representative character. At an early date it was divorced from the *agape* or communal meal of which in Apostolic times and indeed during the next generation it had been the climax. Then it became a secret too holy to be described to unbelievers or seen by the unbaptised: Justin is the last to give any account of it in a book addressed to the heathen.<sup>1</sup> Then its time was moved from evening to morning in order that it might more fitly sanctify the day: in Tertullian's time the faithful took home portions of the consecrated bread and ate a morsel before the first meal.<sup>2</sup> Then regulations for fasting begin to appear: non-communicating attendance, private masses, and masses not to commemorate the dead but to secure their release from purgatory soon follow: the resemblance to the Eucharist of the Apostolic age has become scarcely recognisable.

Along with this change in the quality of the service goes a corresponding change in regard to the sacred elements. In an age of magic, of amulets and talismans, charms and philtres<sup>3</sup> it was generally believed that the appropriate incantation could bestow supernatural

<sup>1</sup>*Apol.*, I, 6 and 65.

<sup>2</sup>*Ad Uxorem*, II, 5.

<sup>3</sup>cf. the long and detailed account in Hippolytus, *Ref. Haer.*, IV.

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powers upon inanimate objects. How far Apuleius or Lucian would have credited the tales of witchcraft with which they intersperse their books may be doubted: the romancer and the satyrist may be allowed a large license. But the records of early alchemy and its Greek and Egyptian forerunners show that the scientific outlook of Aristotle or Hippocrates was not long maintained, and that in the Christian era belief in the efficacy of mystic and often meaningless formulæ was shared by serious students. It is not surprising therefore to find superstitious ideas attaching themselves to the bread and wine of the Eucharist. When even Irenæus<sup>1</sup>, speaking of the bread of immortality, shows plainly his belief that when eaten it forms the stuff of the resurrection body, it is easy to infer how crude were the notions of less erudite believers. When Cyprian<sup>2</sup> tells, as a miracle which he has himself witnessed, the story of the baby taken by its nurse in time of persecution to eat a morsel of food offered to an idol and afterwards to the Eucharist—"and the sacred blood would not stay in the polluted body"—he indicates how soon magical powers were ascribed to the elements. It is a short step from such a tale to the bleeding wafers of the Middle Ages.

These influences are of course parallel to or indeed directly connected with the degradation of the value of nature and history which we have already considered. They gave to the priesthood and so to the Church a directly divine character, set them apart from the rest of the world as intruders into it from the other side of the gulf that separated the natural and the supernatural, and as Christ Himself was removed from all contact with

<sup>1</sup>*Adv. Haer.*, IV, 18, 5.

<sup>2</sup>*De Lapsis*, 25.

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humanity replaced Him as the Saviour and mediator by the hierarchy of His Church.<sup>1</sup> A society constituted after the pattern of a totalitarian state and claiming to control and dispense the sole means of spiritual life thus came to represent the Christ of the Apostolic *kerygma*.

We have laid stress upon these theological and religious changes which explain the creation of a sacerdotal caste and transformed the community of believers into a rigidly organised hierarchical state or empire. But in practice their influence was less immediately effective than the tendency to model Christian institutions upon the pattern provided by secular government. As the Church grew in power its status in the social order could not permanently remain that of a guild or college. Its numbers gave it a direct influence upon public life and local government: its affairs required competent and official management: its representatives were inevitably drawn into large administrative and even political activities. That it should become an *imperium in imperio* was perhaps inevitable; that it did so, assuming more and more the form of a supernatural empire, with its supreme head or heads, its provincial governors, its court and courts, its constitution and law, its political, administrative and financial departments, its graded office-bearers each with their proper perquisites and prestige, is a familiar story. Nor if such a development were necessary is the pattern of the Roman Empire a bad one to copy. The poet who bade his countrymen accept the business of government as their special task may have been less conscious than we are of their limitations in other directions: at least he fastened upon the quality in which they were at their best. That the

<sup>1</sup>cf. Heim, *Spirit and Truth*, pp. 134-54.

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Christian Church survived in the West despite the barbarians with so much greater vigour than in the East is sufficient proof of the value of what it borrowed from the genius of Rome. The pattern was a good one; but to adopt it was of course to change and change profoundly the whole character and spirit of Christianity.

For the development of a constitutional system modelled upon the Roman Empire went far beyond the change from an organic to an organised society, which we considered in relation to the Pauline and the Pastoral Epistles. In the early days and indeed until the opening of the third century office in the Church was democratic and representative: the community was regarded as possessing authority even though, for the well-being of the body, particular functions were delegated to the appropriate members; and the duty of governing was exercised in the spirit of the pastor rather than of the magistrate.<sup>1</sup> Jesus had taught that His followers must not seek domination or play the overlord in the fashion of the Gentiles; and condemned thereby, as St. Paul realised, all impersonal and mechanical regimentation of the Church. The legalism which argues that hard cases make bad law, not less than the bureaucracy which treats a person as a cypher, contradicts the essential principles of the Gospel; for to the Christian every case including his own is a hard case, and personality with its freedom to reject is sacred. "Judge not that ye be not judged" is a precept hard to reconcile with a highly organised corporate life.

In the third century the development of official and sacerdotal influence becomes rapid. The suppression of

<sup>1</sup>Batiffol, *Primitive Catholicism*, insists on a *magisterium* inherited by bishops from Apostles: he conceals the fact that this authority wholly changes its character.

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Montanism is not only a symptom but a stimulus. After it, as Origen repeatedly shows, the clergy by virtue of their status claim to themselves gifts proper to the whole body and dependent upon spiritual quality rather than upon authorised rank. Batiffol<sup>1</sup> has collected a number of passages from the Commentary on St. Matthew in which the great Alexandrian criticises the greed for preferment, the arrogance, the nepotism, the hypocrisy, the secret vices of the clergy and insists as against the development of magical and *ex opere operato* claims that only those who share the Spirit of the Apostles can effectually exercise their functions. It would be an exaggeration to say that as the emphasis upon outward and visible signs, upon a formal liturgy, a rigid constitution, a hierarchical system, increased, so the inward and spiritual grace of the Church diminished; for as we have seen other factors contributed to the same result. But Origen's testimony, which is borne out by Tertullian<sup>2</sup> before him and by Eusebius<sup>3</sup> later, proves that the noblest mind of the age was shocked by the evidence of a tragic and scandalous growth of clerical prestige and clerical worldliness. "The Church by the covetousness and luxury of some (alas that they should be also the leaders of the laity) has become a den of thieves."<sup>4</sup>

In the third century also we can see the transition from the informal age in which the Church was represented by its leading doctors and thinkers, even if like Origen they were outside the hierarchy, to the period when Councils of Bishops replaced the individual leader. Origen's own pupils, who in the middle of the third century occupied

<sup>1</sup>*Primitive Catholicism*, pp. 304-9.

<sup>2</sup>cf. especially *De Fuga* and *De Pudicitia*.

<sup>3</sup>*H.E.*, VIII, 1 and 2.

<sup>4</sup>Origen, *Comm. in Matt.*, XVI, 21.

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all the chief sees of the East, were largely responsible for initiating conciliar government, and used it effectively in the notorious case of Paul of Samosata. That bishops and leaders should meet and discuss and settle the affairs of the Church was a natural and desirable development. But in Paul's case the fact that the sentence upon him had to be executed by appeal to the emperor set a dangerous precedent. The holding of Councils soon became regular and Constantine turned to it when having failed to settle the issue between Arius and his bishop by personal admonition he summoned the first Œcumenical Council at Nicæa. Though he behaved on that occasion with dignity and gave a stern rebuke to those who had sought to win his favour by intrigue, the political motive behind his action and the secular penalties which followed the Council's verdict had a disastrous influence upon Christendom.

The years of controversy which followed revealed afresh the inherent weakness of the Eastern Church. Thucydides,<sup>1</sup> when he declared that faction was the bane of Hellas, drew attention to a fatal flaw in the Greek character. The glory of Greece never manifested itself in large-scale political achievement. The city-state might be capable for a generation or two of rising to the splendour of Periclean Athens when a great leader gripped the imaginations of his fellow-citizens. Even so the passion for intrigue was never eradicated; the social structure was unstable and impermanent; discipline could neither be imposed from within nor accepted from without. It is significant that St. Paul's first letter to Corinth should open with a protest against faction,

<sup>1</sup>*Hist.*, III, 82—a famous passage, singularly relevant to our present distresses.

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and that Clement of Rome a generation later should have to repeat the same rebuke. Not even the Spirit of Pentecost could give unity to the Greeks.

When political power came to the Church with the conversion of the emperor, Greek Christendom revealed its besetting sin. The long series of Councils during the Arian controversy had as its proper purpose the attempt to revise the harsh and to Greek theologians unduly Sabellian verdict of Nicæa, and to allay a schism which led to civil strife in every centre of population. But the attempt was frustrated by the plots and jealousies, the sycophancy and suspicions of the leaders; and though the wise generosity of Athanasius in A.D. 362 gave an opportunity to bring the conflict to a peaceful issue, the orthodox were too eager for public vindication and private revenge to leave the issue to time. When Theodosius came to the throne they saw their chance; secured the calling of the Council of Constantinople in A.D. 381; obtained secular support for the crushing of the Arians; and started a new era of schism by the condemnation of Apollinarius and the creation of the patriarchate of Constantinople.

The next seventy years despite the shame of the detailed story have something of the greatness of Attic tragedy, as the fatal gift of political power works out its effects in the destruction of the noblest and most ancient churches of Christendom. The rivalry of Alexandria and Constantinople, a rivalry in which the personal ambitions of the Alexandrian bishops did not hesitate to use theological speculations as the *casus belli* broke out when Theophilus as part of the disgraceful campaign against Origenism secured the condemnation of John Chrysostom in A.D. 401. Here the political motive is

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hardly concealed. Chrysostom was a saint and a preacher, a man worthy to lead the new imperial patriarchate: he belonged to the great school of Antioch, was the friend of its leading scholar Theodore of Mopsuestia, and as such represented the one effective opposition to Origen's exegesis and theology. Yet Theophilus of whose see Origen had been the chief glory did not hesitate to commit an act of parricide, to denounce Chrysostom as favourable to certain Origenists, to work upon his unpopularity with the Court, and to secure by intrigue and bribery his deposition and banishment. That a bishop of Alexandria should denounce an Antiochene for Origenism is a travesty of justice almost Gilbertian: that it succeeded proves how unscrupulous ecclesiastical feuds had now become.<sup>1</sup>

The second and third phases of the struggle have been already described.<sup>2</sup> By the second the churches of Mesopotamia and the far East were driven into isolation; and the Persian frontier became a religious as well as a civil boundary. After the third Dioscurus followed Nestorius into schism, and the church of Alexandria, the chief pillar of Eastern Christendom, fell with him and involved the whole Greek church in its ruin. The Monophysite or Jacobite schism produced civil strife throughout the Eastern Empire; Justinian's statesmanship and prestige failed to repair the disaster; the condition of Christianity in what had been its earliest strongholds became intolerably corrupt: and the way was prepared for Mohammed and the easy victories of Islam. Constantinople, thanks rather to the Byzantine Empire than to any special merit of its own, survived and main-

<sup>1</sup>Lest this be thought biased, Catholic readers should consult Fliche and Martin, *Histoire de l'Eglise*, IV, pp. 129-147.

<sup>2</sup>cf. pp. 155-6.



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tained precariously its independence of Rome; but the centre of influence shifted decisively to the West.

There the story is very different. The Roman church had shown from early times the genius for constitution-making and political stability which had been characteristic of its people. Untroubled by interest in speculation, brilliant in adapting old forms and formularies to meet new needs, statesmanlike in their practical wisdom and organising efficiency, the great Roman bishops were able to accept and use the gift of political power and to fit themselves to take up Rome's task of "ruling the peoples." Before Constantine they had won an acknowledged supremacy over the churches of the West; after him their authority both secular and ecclesiastical increased steadily by a succession of familiar developments. Liberius might sign an Arian creed in A.D. 356;<sup>1</sup> Martin of Tours and Ambrose might protest against the killing of Priscillian for heresy in A.D. 385. But when after Chalcedon Leo claimed the primacy of Christendom not on account of the status of the city but as the successor of St. Peter, and asserted that the mildness of the Church is helped by the severity of Christian princes, he established the papacy as a world-wide and totalitarian power and accepted the willingness of the State to punish heretics by death.<sup>2</sup> It is a short step from Leo's position to Canossa and to the Holy Office. The Pope was ready to assume the triple crown and to set the throne of St. Peter above the Cross as the new instrument of salvation.

We may not like the shape which Christendom thus adopted; and no Christian of whatever allegiance can

<sup>1</sup>cf. Gwatkin, *Studies of Arianism*, pp. 192-4.

<sup>2</sup>cf. Coulton, *Inquisition and Liberty*, pp. 26-7, for a discussion of Leo's attitude.

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defend the atrocities or conceal the corruptions which accompanied and sustained the supernatural Empire. But when the dark ages closed in, and the Western world had to face invasions from which the East was relatively free, it was well that the Church, which had succeeded in commending its gospel to the Orientals at the cost of a degradation of nature, and to the Greeks by imperilling its basis in history, should have adapted itself to the Roman temperament and made concessions to Roman administrative ability. It is not necessary to minimise the distortion of the *kerygma*; still less to accept the permanence of what was done. But that this happened in the course of the process of adaptation to environment which is the condition of all terrestrial life, and that there is little justification for denouncing men who were led step by step to make changes which served this process, can hardly be denied.

Indeed it is not the process that we need judge—though in estimating it by comparison with the Apostolic criterion an implicit judgment is inevitable; that these things happened in the earlier phases of Christian development is merely matter for our observation. The trouble arises not because they happened but because they have not been outgrown. When Rome incorporated into the constitution of the Catholic Church a theology distorted by the rejection of nature and of history, she gave to this rejection a permanence which has proved disastrous. The Church gained security by becoming at once immune against the strong and predatory against the weak; and the rocks are full of the fossilised remains of creatures that have gained a brief supremacy by their bulk or their ferocity. Such creatures have no future. Life which is sensitiveness and sympathy is only promoted

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by those who remain adaptable and are schooled by suffering. The rigidity of the Catholic system was unable to adjust itself to changes of environment, and when it ceased to be able to control those changes, found itself self-imprisoned by the very structure which had been its safety.

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IT would be beyond the scope of this book and its author's capacity to trace historically and in detail the effects of the distortions that we have been considering through the whole course of subsequent history. Nor is it necessary to do so. We are all aware that in the name of Christ's religion bitter controversies have broken out against the study of the natural sciences, against the application of historical criticism to the Bible, and against the attempts to reform the social order or to alter the organisation of the Church. Indeed, the refusal of Christian orthodoxy to accept a valuation of nature and history inherent in its own basic tenets and earliest gospel is a chief cause of the success of rival ideologies and of the widespread conviction that Christianity is an out-of-date survival, incapable of maintaining itself in the environment of modern knowledge. It is certainly proof of the extent to which adjustments excusable in the second and third centuries have been accepted as essential elements in Christian thought and life. It explains why so many of the noblest men and women of the last century felt themselves compelled, as Samuel Butler put it, to renounce Christ for Christ's sake; and why to-day the general trend of opinion in Britain and America becomes steadily more indifferent to institutional religion. Our concern is to consider whether the organic and organised

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Church can readjust itself to its present environment, an environment in which the love of nature and the importance of history are as manifest as the danger of totalitarian and imperialistic rule.

As regards the order of nature it is only too evident that the influence of organised Christianity all through the Middle Ages did nothing to encourage and much to repress appreciation not only of its scientific but of its æsthetic and religious value. Such knowledge as there is among churchmen is confined to borrowings from Aristotle, Pliny and Ælian; and is in fact inferior to that of Basil's *Hexameron*. The "Bestiaries" of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries reveal an almost grotesque ignorance, and even the great work of Albertus Magnus, the twenty-six books *De Animalibus*, is full of absurdities except where it is derived directly if without acknowledgment from Aristotle. Both in science and in medicine the Church clung to authority, discouraged and suppressed fresh observation and inquiry, and consequently forced students of nature to identify themselves with the professors of the black arts and to carry on their work outside of, and under suspicion from, Christendom. When even Augustine could use the authority of Scripture to deny the existence of the Antipodes, and when childish legends were accepted as inerrant, it is obvious that any intelligent observer would inevitably find himself asking inconvenient questions, and be lucky to escape without being branded like Roger Bacon as a magician or like Peter Abana as a heretic. But the story of the persecutions and martyrdoms of the heroes of science need not be retold. They are familiar proof of the extent to which the Church had distorted the message and forsaken the spirit of its prime.

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Less familiar is the success of the ecclesiastics in crushing the æsthetic and religious interest in nature which showed itself in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. This is nowadays generally misunderstood because of the modern devotion to St. Francis of Assisi, "the only one among the saints to have captivated the Protestant mind,"<sup>1</sup> and its enthusiasm for his love of nature. That the "little poor man" displayed a joy in his brothers and sisters of the animal world, a nature-mysticism of a high order, and a Christ-like quality of character unique among the saints, does not prove that he is in these respects typical either of his age or of the canonised. No doubt among the simple folk to whom he ministered, the craftsmen and peasants of his day, there were many who responded to his discovery of the spiritual value of sun and moon, of beasts and flowers. But the attitude of churchmen is much nearer to the story of St. Dominic and the sparrow<sup>2</sup> than to that of St. Francis and the wolf. The Canticle of the Sun never enjoyed the popularity or influence of the *Dies iræ* or the *Stabat Mater*, even though it is the sole poetical utterance of the saint that has any claim to authenticity, and the two latter come only from his followers, probably Thomas of Celano and Jacopone da Todi. Francis was revered not for his love of nature but for his meditations upon the Five Wounds, not for his kinship with creation but for his success in winning its children back to the support of the supernatural Church. Pope Innocent III had accepted him that he might shore up the tottering basilica of St. John Lateran: Pope Gregory IX over-rode his testament in order to pay for a great temple in his honour at Assisi.

<sup>1</sup>J. et J. Tharaud in *Why Birds Sing*, p. xvii.

<sup>2</sup>cf. Coulton, *From St. Francis to Dante*, p. 318; he saw the devil in the bird and plucked it alive.

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Even the mysticism which gave him his vivid sense of kinship with all creation lost something of its universality among his followers. Ramon Lull, most romantic of the *jongleurs de Dieu*, narrowed the range of his vision to the heavenly lover; and the Spanish mystics of the sixteenth century never reach the range of Francis's sensitiveness, limit their concern to "God and my soul" and often display an almost morbid strain of eroticism. Their passion for God leaves room for the surrender of the earth rather than for discovering its worth.<sup>1</sup> With Francis the light of the divine illuminated all his world and set every common bush afire: with them its brilliance was so focused upon the supernatural as to cast a shadow over nature. His experience, if it had been perpetuated, might have saved Christendom from the influence of Dionysius the Areopagite and the sub-Christian escapism of the *via negativa*. His followers could not resist the pull of tradition or maintain his large generosity of spirit. If he had bridged the gulf between the world of nature and the world of religion, they dare not use his bridge; and their successors set themselves deliberately to destroy it. It is an indication of the extent to which Christendom is still enslaved to distortion that in the recent revival of interest in mysticism so few Christian students recognise the contrast between the positive and incarnational mysticism of Francis and the negative, dualistic and in the last resort Oriental mysticism of the "Cloud of Unknowing." Is it unkind to express the hope that the Nazi enthusiasm for Eckhardt will reveal to the admirers of his type of mysticism how far he and his tradition fall short of the Christian experience?

<sup>1</sup>Though Luis de Granada and Luis de Leon both "mount by the staircase of the created world to contemplation of the Creator," cf. Peers, *Studies of the Spanish Mystics*, I, pp. 62-70, 307-17.

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So too with the outburst of delight in nature which manifests itself in the art of the period. The men who carved the foliage at Rheims or a century later the bosses at Southwell or the canopies of the Lady Chapel at Ely had plainly seen and considered the green things of earth. Like the early painters who place their Madonnas upon lawns starred with exquisitely rendered flowers and against backgrounds of woodland and hill, they could not keep their love of nature out of their artistry. There is a knowledge and an imagination, a joy and humour, in this part of their work, which is not to be found in the conventional and often insipid figures which it frames. The pitchfork of a strict ecclesiasticism might fling their offering into the corners and roofs of the sanctuary lest it should distract attention from the manger and the crucifix, or the angels and devils of the judgment. But at least it blossoms there for our delight, until tradition asserts itself and the realism of the carvings must be replaced by formal cusps and arabesques and the Holy Child set upon a carpeted throne amid a guard of saints. In the eyes of the Church it is manifest that any interest in nature is regarded with hostility as irreconcilable with man's true and supernatural concerns.

It is with the Renaissance that the Church's stubborn refusal to return to its original gospel becomes disastrous. The advent of the new knowledge, opening up a fresh understanding of the Scriptures as well as an enthusiasm for discovery and invention, ought surely to have recalled Christendom to a truer interpretation of the gospel and a wider appreciation of that gospel's significance. The Church was not unwarned and need not have been frightened into antagonism. Reform had been in the air long before the Reformation; and if the advocates of



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the new ways were often critical and contemptuous, they had at first and for long no desire except to urge changes from within. Unfortunately the evil precedent of persecution had been established too securely: the crusade against the Albigenses, the torturings and burnings by the Inquisition, the fate of Huss and of the Lollards had convinced the Church of its power to repress, had caloused its conscience and lowered its vitality. There was not enough strength for penitence and a fresh start; nor vision of the signs of the times; nor will to examine traditional uses or challenge vested interests. The new learning became identified with heresy and in consequence orthodoxy seemed synonymous with ignorance: the noblest spirits of the age were driven into silence or opposition: individual pioneers were martyred: the joy in appreciating nature and the zest in exploring it were divorced from organised religion. The Church lost the opportunity of rectifying the old distortion which a more faithful commendation of the gospel would have secured.

That the Reformation did little to improve the situation is further proof of the extent to which the rejection of nature had been carried. Luther indeed by his recognition of the divinely constituted orders, the family and the state, and of secular occupations as in some sense religious vocations, might well have given his protest the character of an annulment of the divorce between religion and life. In fact by his insistence on the antithesis between faith and works he substituted pietism for sacerdotalism and gave Cæsar an authority in his own sphere which no Catholic would have allowed. Catholicism had at least insisted that all life must be dominated by the supremacy of the supernatural even if by so doing it debased the value of the natural: Luther admitting the

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value of the natural<sup>1</sup> gave it so largely independent a status as to reduce the function of the Church to the maintenance of private devotion. That the Lutheran churches are still on the whole far behind those of the English-speaking world in their concern for social conditions, their fostering of a love of nature and history, is a consequence of the great Reformer's own outlook and theology. He was in mind if not in heart a churchman of his day.

Calvin's work, though far more profound in its theology, merely accentuated the cleavage; for the antithesis between nature and grace, which had never been accepted by Catholics in spite of their devotion to St. Augustine, was restated more rigidly by him than by his predecessor. Augustinianism so far as it asserted the total depravity of human nature and denounced the natural order as a mass of corruption had been like Paulinism a distorted version of its author's real teaching, and even so had been modified and rejected within a few years of his death: Calvinism, restating the same verdict with an even more ruthless logic, proved itself as stern a foe as the Inquisition to science and the love of nature. If its methods were less physically cruel, they were not less subtle or effective. The frontier between the kingdoms was drawn, defined and fortified; and when Servetus anticipated the fate of Bruno it was made plain that no mercy would be shown to those who crossed it. Nature was the enemy; any dealings with it were a treason against God: and if a charge of heresy could not be sustained, there was always the sin of wizardry or witchcraft for which Holy Writ prescribed the penalty of death.

<sup>1</sup>For his love of nature cf. R. H. Murray, *Erasmus and Luther*, p. 155: this did not prevent him from rigidly separating it from grace.

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With the Catholic Church equipped for a rivalry of repression by the foundation of the Society of Jesus, the Holy Office and the Index, stimulated by the rigidity of the Tridentine decrees, and embittered by the wars of religion, it is small wonder that any recovery of a truly incarnational Christianity was frustrated or that the love of nature was forced into opposition to ecclesiastical authority.

Yet, though the Reformation failed to recall Christendom to its original faith, its indirect effects were vast and valuable. It had destroyed the sole dominance of the tradition and challenged the right of any earthly authority to dictate the content of human thinking and study. Moreover if the Reformers set up systems of theology scarcely less rigid and tyrannical than that which they rejected, at least their principles gave a liberty and value to the individual which once granted could be used against themselves. The appeal to an infallible Bible may indeed be more deadening than that to an infallible Church; for the contents of the one are closed while the other can at least change. But the Scriptures contain a testimony to the worth of nature, to the manhood of Jesus, and to His insistence upon the loving care of the Creator which no Calvinistic exegesis could permanently obscure. For the time the cleavage between natural and supernatural might be maintained, and the progress of scientific and historical studies be resisted: but the servitude to tradition was over, and the new hierarchies could not wield the unquestioned power of the old. The expansion of human interests and knowledge that resulted from the discovery of America and the exploration of the earth, the development of education once it had broken away from monastic control, the

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growth of cities and of the middle-class citizen—these and a dozen other changes forced men to pay heed to the world around them, to discover the absurdity of thinking that Aristotle had said the last word in physical science, and to set themselves to the serious observation and classification of the whole range of phenomena. The development of printing, and the invention of the telescope and microscope, gave them resources for the task.

Of the struggles by which their results were won and welcomed as of the pioneers themselves—of Copernicus, Tycho Brahe, Kepler and Galileo, of Sanctorius, Harvey and von Helmont, of Gesner, Ray and Linnæus—this is not the place to speak. The hostility of churchmen to their efforts has been fully described, not without prejudice by J. W. Draper,<sup>1</sup> and A. D. White<sup>2</sup> and more sympathetically by J. Y. Simpson.<sup>3</sup> It is a tragic tale, and the end of it is scarcely yet in sight. That men who were animated by zeal for the study of the works of the Lord (which as the Psalmist declares are “sought out of all them that have pleasure therein”) should have been met always with suspicion and often with persecution by the official representatives of Christ is proof that men still “make the word of God of none effect by their tradition” and that the tradition was insuperably strong. But our concern is not to denounce, but to estimate the effects of that which deserves denunciation.

The real fact is that with most, if not all, of the early naturalists the motive was a deep spiritual and religious hunger which they had failed to satisfy with the food provided by the Church. If science is “the body of organised knowledge” and the scientist primarily an

<sup>1</sup>*History of the Conflict between Religion and Science.*

<sup>2</sup>*A History of the Warfare of Science with Theology in Christendom.*

<sup>3</sup>*Landmarks in the Struggle between Science and Religion.*

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inquisitive and soulless observer, these men were far more than scientists. Their love of nature was a means of worship, a reverent wonder for its beauty and order, its infinite variety and apprehended unity, its power to fascinate and educate and inspire. It gave them, as it gives to multitudes in our own day a quickening of sensibilities, an intellectual discipline and a fineness of character which often lift them high above their ecclesiastical critics. They found in it what they could not find in the churches, an adventure which demanded the best that heart and mind and will could give; and in it, whatever the orthodox might say, they claimed to be glorifying God.<sup>1</sup>

John Ray's case is typical—and as a distinguished son of Cambridge University and the founder of natural history in this country<sup>2</sup> it is a pious duty to select him. He was the son of a blacksmith near Braintree, born in A.D. 1627, educated at the local grammar school, sent to Cambridge at the expense of a neighbouring squire, and elected to a fellowship at Trinity College in 1649. He wrote admirable Latin, knew Greek and Hebrew, and preached "solid and useful divinity."<sup>3</sup> But his interest was in nature rather than academic subjects, and in 1660 he published a *Catalogue of plants growing around Cambridge*, the first local flora issued in England and containing a careful description of 626 species. In the same year he was ordained by the bishop of Lincoln.

Two years later he was forced to choose between

<sup>1</sup>cf. Plukenet's comment on Ray's *Historia Plantarum*, "the best medium to reach Heaven, better than ye divinity of ye Schools," quoted by Gunther, *Further Correspondence of John Ray*, p. ix.

<sup>2</sup>This is mild praise: he is called by Haller "the greatest botanist in the memory of man," by Cuvier "the first true systematist of the animal kingdom" and by Newton, "the founder of scientific ornithology."

<sup>3</sup>So Archbishop Tenison, quoted by Derham, *Life of Ray*, p. 10 (ed. Lankester).

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science and the Church. Though he had never subscribed to the Covenant, believing it to be unlawful, when ordered by the Bartholomew Act to repudiate it as not binding he refused to do so.<sup>1</sup> This involved the resignation not only of his orders but of his fellowship. He was a poor man; and his position at Trinity gave him leisure, security and the means to pursue his studies. The vast majority of his colleagues did not scruple to subscribe; it could not have been a severe strain upon his conscience to do so. But he was a man of scrupulous integrity and in fact had found a vocation which appealed to him more than the teaching of Hebrew or the stewardship of College estates. He and his pupil and friend, Francis Willughby, had already formed the plan of producing a systematic account of the whole organic world; and to this he gladly devoted himself. Three years of travel in Europe, six years with his friend at his home in Warwickshire or on tour through the English counties, gave him a mass of material. Then on Willughby's death he devoted eight years to tutoring and to producing Willughby's Ornithology, a collection of English dialect words, and an account of their travels. Finally, in 1680 he settled down to complete his great work on plants, Willughby's history of fishes, his own classification of animals, his studies of insects, and his county lists of plants. He wrote two great books on natural philosophy,—*The Wisdom of God manifested in the Works of the Creation* in 1692<sup>2</sup> and *Three Physico-Theological Discourses* in 1693<sup>3</sup>—the former full of detailed exposition

<sup>1</sup>cf. Dale's *Life of Ray* quoted by Gunther, *Further Correspondence*, pp. 6, 7.

<sup>2</sup>Of this at least thirteen editions appeared during the next hundred years.

<sup>3</sup>The book was first printed with a different title in the previous year.

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of the whole range of natural history, the latter remarkable for its inquiry into the nature of "formed stones" or fossils. A small devotional work, *A Persuasive to a Holy Life*, was published in 1700, four years before his death. Three years after it his great successor, Linnæus the Swede, was born.

Ray's modesty in publishing so much of his own work under his friend's name—a modesty which his great successor<sup>1</sup> shared—and the fact that his short descriptive names were obviously less convenient than Linnæus's binomial system, have tended to deprive him of some of the renown that should be his due. No one who realises the boorish ignorance of his predecessors, or the admirable brevity and perspicacity of his definitions, or the immense range of his interests, or the thoroughness of his observations, will doubt that he initiated a new era in natural history. To have found and discriminated plants so rare and insignificant as *Liparis loeselii*<sup>2</sup> or *Veronica spicata*,<sup>3</sup> to have drawn up lists of the flora of every county except Middlesex, and to have been prepared to revise his principles of classification until he reached a scheme substantially the same as that now in use—these would be no mean life's work; and in addition he produced the first intelligible classification of animals, birds, reptiles, fishes and insects, and that not as a mere compiler but with constant evidence of originality, insight and knowledge.<sup>4</sup> No one could have done such

<sup>1</sup>cf. his account of the generic name *Limnæa*, "lowly, insignificant, disregarded, flowering but for a brief space, from Linnæus who resembles it"—*Critica Botanica* (ed. Hort), p. 64.

<sup>2</sup>*Catalogus Plantarum circa Cantabrigiam*, p. 105.

<sup>3</sup>l.c. p. 174: it has lately been rediscovered in Ray's locality.

<sup>4</sup>Thus, e.g., Part I of *The Wisdom of God* is full of exact and first-hand knowledge of the habits and structure of birds, fishes and insects, c.f., pp. 135-86.

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work without that flair which only an authentic devotion can bestow; and it is this quality which gives him his creative power. When the record of man's religious development comes to be told, Ray and Linnæus will take a high place among the great reformers: between them they opened up a new field of spiritual endeavour.

Ray's influence in his own country was felt almost at once. The study of the fauna and flora of particular counties, which has been so fruitful a source of devoted effort from his day to ours, had been taken up during his lifetime.<sup>1</sup> More ambitious works drawing their inspiration from him followed during the next century; and Linnæus who owed much to him sent out pupils into Europe and made zoology and botany favourite pursuits among men of leisure. But it was to Gilbert White and *The Natural History of Selborne*, published in 1789, to Thomas Bewick's *History of British Birds*<sup>2</sup> in 1797, and to James Sowerby's *English Botany*<sup>3</sup> in 1790 that the popularising of the love of nature is chiefly due. Few country clergy have had so wide and beneficent an influence as the curate of Faringdon; no book on natural history has had so vast a circulation;<sup>4</sup> when Newton<sup>5</sup> stated that more than half the zoologists in Britain during the next eighty years had been infected with their love of nature by him, he was speaking well within the truth. Bewick's charming engravings, so eagerly sought by

<sup>1</sup>Plot, *Natural History of Oxfordshire*, 1677, and of *Staffordshire*, 1686; Leigh, *Lancashire, Cheshire and the Peak*, 1700; Borlase, *Cornwall*, 1758.

<sup>2</sup>Letterpress by Beilby.

<sup>3</sup>Letterpress by J. E. Smith, published in annual volumes till 1814, and reprinted with new descriptive matter by J. T. Boswell Syme in 1863; the plates of the later edition are very much inferior in delicacy of colouring.

<sup>4</sup>White's *Selborne* "has had up to now about seventy editions" (Fisher. *Birds as Animals*, p. 5). For a recent appreciation cf. W. Johnson, *Gilbert White, Pioneer, Poet and Stylist*.

<sup>5</sup>*Dictionary of Birds*, p. 19.



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book-collectors, took his volumes into every self-respecting household. Sowerby, whose exquisitely coloured plates have in their original issues never been surpassed, familiarised his fellow-countrymen with the beauty of their flowers and made the recognition of them easy and general. From that time the love of animals, birds and plants has steadily increased and become a characteristic feature of British life. It was extended to include entomology at about the same period, though it was not until the publication of Edward Newman's *Illustrated Natural History of British Butterflies and Moths* in 1869 that the study of these insects became a serious rival of the other subjects.

The result of this devotion to the study of nature has been far more profound than is usually realised. At first its votaries were regarded as mentally defective—was not Lady Glanville accused of madness in Ray's lifetime on account of her interest in butterflies? Birds and animals speedily became respectable objects of study—they fell within the field of that curious creature, the sportsman-naturalist, and gave him an excuse for carrying and using a gun. Botany was accepted as a suitable hobby for young ladies, and suffers from the fact that dried plants do not keep the beauty of eggs or skins or mounted insects. Moth-collecting which is probably the most fascinating of them all is still with most of us a subject of ridicule; but it combines so fine a variety of activities with so rich a reward that before the war its devotees numbered some fifteen thousand, largely drawn from the working-classes. By the middle of last century natural history had won a definite status. Outside the range of the learned bodies local Natural History Societies, like that which Charles Kingsley founded at

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Chester, were springing up everywhere. Meetings, periodicals and books were multiplied; and even the schools began to take notice. With the introduction of the camera and the extension of interest from classification to problems of behaviour and habit, the mere collector is giving way to the observer and student. With the increase of urban life more and more of our people are finding an outlet and refreshment in the study of nature. With its development its æsthetic, educative and moral value becomes more evident. It is a factor in the make-up of our folk which no one who cares for their welfare can ignore.

Once more it must be repeated that the love of nature which we are considering is not synonymous with science nor to be estimated in terms of scientific achievement. The great scientist usually possesses it, and to it owes the secret of his greatness. But it is shared by very many who are hardly scientists at all. Charles Kingsley, Richard Jefferies, W. H. Hudson, Lord Grey—these and the multitude of their colleagues represent a movement of the spirit of man which is of profound significance for religion. No one can read their books without knowing that they have found something here which has the quality of a mystery, something which not only satisfies their need for worship, for wonder and awe, but which initiates them into an experience rich in religious value, an insight into the meaning of life, a sensitiveness to its joy and pain, a purifying of the springs of conduct, a faith in the worth of the universe. Those who have not shared this experience may regard it as mere sentimentality—as if nature had not its liverflukes as well as its lambs; or dismiss it with a murmur of pantheism—as if the struggle for existence did not inevitably raise the whole

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problem of evil and of judgment; or sneer at it as an escapism—until they discover the moral worth, the friendliness and sympathy and self-forgetfulness of its devotees. But, for those who understand it, there is testimony to an element in humanity which the Church has too long ignored, an element which as we have insisted takes an authentic and essential place in the Christian gospel. That it has its limits none will dispute. There are fields of emotion and thought and effort at the human level which lower types of life can hardly reach. The realities unveiled in nature are more plainly revealed in mankind and most plainly in the Christ. But it may well be doubted whether the man who cannot find anything worshipful in the lilies or the sparrows is likely to appreciate Him who bade us consider how they grow and assured us that His Father cared for them. Between the natural and the supernatural, between nature and grace, there is no such gulf as the tradition asserts. God is Creator as well as Redeemer; and the nature-lover is often nearer than the churchman to a true appreciation of the first article of the Creed.

We have spoken thus at some length of the movement in Britain; for it is probable that in no country is the love of nature so general, and certain that in none have circumstances so strongly assisted its growth. Of the former an Englishman must speak with modesty—especially if he is conscious of his countrymen's passion for blood sports and for the useless and often unscrupulous collecting of dead specimens. But Tharaud's<sup>1</sup> point that *The Times* regularly prints records of the first chiff-chaff or the last swallow or the extending range of the comma butterfly while "the news item that a flight of shrike

<sup>1</sup>In *Why Birds Sing*, p. xv.

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has just passed by Gardepée would seem very absurd to us in *Le Journal* or *Le Petit Parisien*" confirms our claim; and the publishers' lists, the dozens of books on natural history that are issued every year, tell the same tale. Of the latter it is easier to be confident; and it bears directly upon our main theme. .

Ray was a younger contemporary at Cambridge of the remarkable group of thinkers, the Cambridge Platonists, who protested alike against the narrow and dogmatic "canting" of the Puritans and against the equally dogmatic ecclesiasticism of the Laudians in the interest of a more tolerant, reasonable and mystic theology. Whichcote was preaching at Holy Trinity every Sunday from 1636 till 1656, and in 1651 while Vice-Chancellor had written his famous letters to Tuckney, the Master of Emmanuel. John Smith, the "living library," was a fellow of Queens' from 1644 till his early death in 1652 and like Ray was learned in Hebrew. Ralph Cudworth was made Regius Professor of Hebrew in 1645 and joined Henry More at Christ's in 1654. Ray's training and outlook must have been profoundly influenced by these men;<sup>1</sup> and their work which did much to save and transform the religion of England gave the study of nature a sanction and impetus. He was also a friend and collaborator of George Wilkins, transferred from Oxford to be Master of Trinity in 1659, one of the founders of the Royal Society, afterwards Bishop of Chester, a man of generous views whose opinions he seems to have shared.<sup>2</sup>

In the next century, even if the Church was in a state

<sup>1</sup>He repeatedly quotes Cudworth and More in his great book *The Wisdom of God*, and Whichcote in the *Three Discourses*.

<sup>2</sup>As is shown in his *Persuasive to a Holy Life*, which is admittedly based upon Wilkins's works.

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of laxity, at least the prevailing temper was favourable to "natural religion" and relieved the scientists of the day from fear of persecution or conflict. If we compare the two outstanding books, Butler's *Analogy*, published in 1736, and Paley's *Natural Theology*, in 1802, we can see how deeply scientific advance had affected the outlook of churchmen: the earlier, and far greater, is concerned only with the grand principles of the divine government of the world; the latter, a compilation<sup>1</sup> and no doubt exaggerated in its teleology, deals in detail with the structure and function of animals and birds,<sup>2</sup> and proves that its author who knew his public realised that such matters were of general interest.<sup>3</sup> The Church was favourable to the new studies, provided they did not openly challenge the Scriptural cosmology. Indeed it was not until the publication of the *Origin of Species* that organised religion displayed open hostility;<sup>4</sup> and by then orthodoxy was too late to repress even if it succeeded in exacerbating.

To state it thus is to state it too superficially. A more adequate explanation is that in Britain Christianity has preserved a closer approximation to the "proportion of the faith" than is to be found either in the pietism of Continental Protestantism or in the supernaturalism of Rome. To speak of it as a *via media* is to suggest a measure of compromise and half-heartedness; and this is unjust

<sup>1</sup>Based for zoology mainly on the *Memoires* of the Academy of Paris, translated into English in 1701; and for botany on Withering and E. Darwin; and (without acknowledgment) upon Ray's *The Wisdom of God*.

<sup>2</sup>e.g., he discusses the barbules of feathers, the hollow bones and different forms of beaks and feet.

<sup>3</sup>For its influence on Darwin cf. *Life and Letters of C.D.*, II, p. 219. "I hardly ever admired a book more than Paley's *Natural Theology*, I could almost have said it by heart."

<sup>4</sup>Yet Keble had described the British Association as "a hodge podge of philosophers" in 1837.

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to its characteristic exponents. Rather the main stream of British Christianity has kept a sense of worship, a high doctrine of the Church, a reverent study of Scripture which has saved it from slipping into humanism, and has kept also an insistence upon conduct, a sense of the worth of individuals and of the world, and a mystic appreciation of nature which is an antidote against ecclesiasticism or exaggerated transcendentalism. In men like Maurice, Westcott and Gore a passion for personal and social righteousness was combined with a profound conviction of the mystery and majesty of God: they could hold together both elements in the gospel, its message of dependence and self-abasement and its message of co-operation and communion. It is significant that Hort, most devoted and judicious of Anglican theologians, declared that "secularism is preferable to a consistent adoption of the view that this present life is to be disparaged and made a mere antecedent to the future."<sup>1</sup> In a Christianity thus faithful to the *kerygma*, the love of nature has a high and legitimate place.

When we turn to other countries certain significant facts are obvious. The love of nature in the sense that we have described is almost confined to the heirs of the Reformation. In the United States, though the exploration of the country occupied the energies of its people until a comparatively late date, the works of Alexander Wilson<sup>2</sup> and J. J. Audubon, the latter printed and published in Britain,<sup>3</sup> gave it a start which has been admirably followed. Probably no country has seen so much study devoted to its fauna and flora in the past

<sup>1</sup>*The Way, the Truth and the Life*, p. 185.

<sup>2</sup>*American Ornithology*, Philadelphia, 1808-14.

<sup>3</sup>*Birds of America*, four elephant folios, London, 1827-38; *Ornithological Biography*, 5 vols., Edinburgh, 1831-9.

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century; and in none is it more valued. In the Baltic countries the great tradition created by Linnæus has been fully maintained, and Liljefors has extended it into the realm of art. In Holland the care of flowers has been fostered for centuries; the nature reserves are wisely and freely used; and natural history enters largely into education. In Germany systematic science and research have been carried on sedulously and successfully, but despite the genius and influence of Goethe there is less evidence of a general love of nature. In all these and in Switzerland there are admirable surveys of the native plants and animals; and in Scandinavia and Holland a number of books like those familiar in Britain, written by men in whom observation and appreciation have an almost religious value; books of this kind hardly exist in the Mediterranean countries.

It is in France that the relationship of a love of nature to Protestantism is most plain. Zoology in its beginnings owes a vast debt to Pierre Belon in the sixteenth century and to Réaumur, Buffon and Cuvier in the eighteenth. The age of Voltaire was not conspicuously illiberal: nevertheless Buffon on the publication of the first volumes of his *Histoire Naturelle* was informed that fourteen propositions in his work were "reprehensible and contrary to the faith of the Church" and was compelled to insert in the next volume a full recantation.<sup>1</sup> He, if anyone, ought to have created popular enthusiasm for the subject; for he had a brilliant style, an abhorrence of technical jargon, a vivid fancy and a gift for speculative theorising. He certainly enlarged the whole scope of natural history, and gave an impetus to its study which bore good fruit

<sup>1</sup>cf. J. Y. Simpson, *Landmarks in the Struggle between Science and Religion*, p. 166.

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in the next generation. But neither he nor his successors succeeded in overcoming the indifference of their fellow-countrymen. There have been splendid exceptions: Fabre's *Souvenirs entomologiques*, which supplied the chief data for Bergson's *L'Evolution créatrice*, are probably the most fascinating records ever published; and to-day Delamain's books, *Why Birds Sing* and *The Days and Nights of Birds*, stand alongside those of Coward or Bengt Berg; but Fabre was an avowed agnostic and Delamain is a Huguenot. For the rest the advice given by a distinguished ornithologist to me when I proposed to do some bird-photography in the Camargue is not unjust: "The French care little for nature: they shoot every bird they see, and where birds are protected they shoot you instead." Anyone who has seen the callousness of the peasantry of Italy, Spain, Southern France or Southern Ireland—the wholesale killing of larks and migrants, the blinding of song-birds with hot irons, the treatment of cattle and donkeys—will not be surprised to be told "Ah, but animals have no souls."

Here again a comparison with the religious outlook of the several countries is of interest. Unquestionably there is truth in Tharaud's statement that "for Catholicism nature always remains more or less the enemy."<sup>1</sup> The "boorish dulness"<sup>2</sup> of the medieval attitude still remains; and the stress upon other-worldliness fostered by the example of so many of the canonised and upon the miracles and superstitions of popular religion tend to make this world common and unclean. Hitherto there has been no movement to rectify the distortions of asceticism, unless the modern conflict against the

<sup>1</sup>l.c., p. xvii.

<sup>2</sup>cf. Gwatkin, *The Knowledge of God*, II, p. 306.



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exaggerated transcendentalism of the Barthian theology should be the first indication of a readjustment.<sup>1</sup> Roman theology has never officially rejected the analogy between nature and grace; and St. Thomas with his strong insistence upon a rational faith could easily be made responsible for a higher appreciation of the natural order. It may be doubted whether the Roman doctrine of the Mass can ever be extended into a truly sacramental theology, or her emphasis upon the supernatural leave room for anything but a contempt for nature; but circumstances may yet compel it; and there is little in her formulated teaching to make it impossible. A book like Dr. Alfred Noyes's *The Unknown God* indicates that among English Catholics at least there is both a demand and a means for a change in this direction.<sup>2</sup>

The fact is that even if Christianity does not realise its duty to welcome this new element in our culture, the spiritual value of nature will inevitably be more widely recognised as civilisation becomes more urban and mechanical. An agricultural population attuned to the rhythm of the seasons, dependent for its livelihood upon seed-time and harvest, spending its days in the care of crops and cattle, may take these things for granted; and for its soul's good must be warned to lift its gaze from the ground and to look beyond the ephemeral to the eternal. The Church has not always been wise in appreciating the mysticism and reverence that familiarity with nature so often engenders, and instead of building upon it, as Jesus did, has been tempted to ignore and condemn. Where it might have led men from their sense of the mystery of a primrose or a chaffinch ("no chaffinch,

<sup>1</sup>cf. especially E. Przywara, *Analogia Entis*, and the account of it in W. M. Horton, *Contemporary Continental Theology*, pp. 70-83.

<sup>2</sup>cf. also A. Roche, *These Animals of ours*.

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but implies the cherubim"<sup>1</sup>) to the higher mysteries of humanity and the Son of Man, it has only seen a paganism that was of the devil, a paganism against which must be set in sharp contrast the claims of "revealed religion." So doing it has failed to sanctify the common life, made its own worship artificial and escapist, and destroyed the possibility of a fully integrated and God-centred experience. But as industrialism spreads and men are deprived of their contact with the earth, they discover like Antæus in the legend their dependence upon it: there comes a sense of restlessness and disharmony, a starvation of soul to which the aspidistras and canaries of the mean streets bear witness. For that disease multitudes have already found a remedy; and as it spreads the *vis medica-trix naturæ* will gain a new meaning.

In thus discussing the love of nature in its widest popular form we may seem to be ignoring the importance of science in the stricter sense. No one who appreciates the revolutionary effects of the scientific method or of scientific studies will wish to under-estimate their influence upon the whole character of civilisation or upon the devotion to nature from which they spring. We have already deplored the tragic blindness of the Church in its hostility to the pioneers of natural knowledge, and paid tribute to the courage and to the achievements of those who braved its wrath. But during the last century when at length the emancipation of the search for truth has been won, the effects of the struggle have become apparent not only in the persistent obscurantism of Christians, but in the narrowness and arrogance of scientists. If we criticise the Church for refusing to recognise the "mystery" of nature, we must in fairness

<sup>1</sup>E. B. Browning, *Aurora Leigh*, VII.

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admit that science in the professional sense of the word has been almost equally to blame. Forced into antagonism to religion its advocates too often developed a materialistic outlook which identified truth with the results of weight and measurement and deified what they had thus distorted.

Laboratory methods appropriate to the study of chemistry and physics can properly be applied to the anatomy and physiology, the bio-chemistry and biophysics of the living organism: that is obvious; and the progress of knowledge in pure and applied science shows how vast and beneficial have been the results. The Cartesian claim that living beings and the universe itself could best be regarded as complicated bits of machinery was a hypothesis which gave a great impetus to the exact study of the physical aspects of organic life— aspects whose importance is beyond question. It may well be, as most biologists would still insist, that a mechanistic system covers all the ground with which they can be concerned; and that to go beyond it is to pass out of the domain of science into regions which can hardly be scientifically studied. The error arises when this system is given sole and all-inclusive authority and the attempt is made to interpret the whole organism in terms of its physics and chemistry. We can sympathise with men who staked out in face of intense ecclesiastical opposition a claim for the autonomy of their own studies and insisted upon their right to search for truth by methods of observation and experiment. We can sympathise with the inevitable tendency to exclude other interests from the fields thus won and to carry the war into the enemy's camp. But it is difficult not to condemn the assertion that this narrow area covered the whole field of human

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knowledge, the complacency which assumed that all truth would soon be disclosed by quantitative analysis, and the wilful blindness which brushed aside and refused to investigate evidence unfavourable to its pretensions. No candid student can doubt that these errors, and not least the last and most inexcusable, have been too frequently characteristic of the biology of the half-century after Darwin.

Darwin both by the character of his work and by the fortune of its occasion was qualified to inaugurate a new era: he achieved what science had long been awaiting. Though his theory especially when applied in *The Descent of Man* to human origins met with violent opposition both from his conservative colleagues<sup>1</sup> and from the champions of Christian tradition, the new outlook was readily adopted. There followed a period in which attention was concentrated upon the attempt to explain the mechanism and the theory of evolution in terms of a single principle. Darwin's law of natural selection, vigorously upheld as the sole and universal principle by Weismann, was challenged and for a time seemed to be overthrown by the Mendel-De Vries doctrine of heredity and mutations. Then the work of Morgan initiated a synthesis between Darwinians and geneticists and has shown that in the structure and changes of genes and chromosomes is to be found the physical mechanism of evolution.<sup>2</sup> At present there seems to be no clear knowledge as to the cause of natural mutations, though they can be produced artificially; and while this remains

<sup>1</sup>It is, of course, wholly unjust to represent the conflict as between science and religion: Wilberforce debating with Huxley was briefed by Owen and had the majority of biologists on his side.

<sup>2</sup>cf., e.g., Hurst, *The Mechanism of Creative Evolution*; Robson and Richards, *The Variation of Animals in Nature*, etc.

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unknown the physical problem cannot be regarded as solved. The much more complex question of the origin of behaviour, such as is illustrated by the spider's web or the parasitism of the cuckoo, for which natural selection is obviously no answer, indicates that we are still very far from an adequate understanding of the whole process. In consequence there is still a wide gulf between research and philosophy: research insists that orthogenesis, entelechy, *élan vital*, or emergence, principles invoked by biological philosophy, involve a "mystical" element which cannot be admitted into the laboratory, and too often dismisses them as irrelevant speculation: philosophy wonders that research is so blind to the real issues and so slow to abandon the supposition that the explanation of organic development can be found by investigation of physical structure. There is an increasing readiness on each side to recognise the need for co-operation and to agree that materialistic categories are inadequate; but the difficulty of bringing the specialist and the generaliser into partnership and of discovering a standpoint and standards acceptable to them both remains.

It is unnecessary to treat this subject in detail in view of the general breakdown of materialism and the increasing recognition that a new and truly organic approach to biology is necessary.<sup>1</sup> More important is it to realise how gravely the combination of a narrow outlook with exaggerated claims has damaged mankind. For it is very largely to this that the present disparity between man's physical achievements and his moral and spiritual resources is due.

<sup>1</sup>I have discussed this matter in *The Creator Spirit* and in my Riddell Lectures, *Evolution and the Christian Concept of God*; and Behaviourism, the *reductio ad absurdum* of mechanistic science, in the Appendix to *The Quest of Religion*, pp. 130-40.

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The revolutionary discoveries of the nineteenth century and the personal eminence of many of the pioneers gave to the scientific movement an almost pontifical prestige. By patient and devoted research the knowledge and control of nature had yielded results which were transforming the life and outlook of humanity. Already enough had been done to encourage the highest expectations. Another generation of such effort would inaugurate the age of which preachers and prophets had spoken in vain. Inevitably as their whole material environment was enriched, men and nations would become civilised, contented, co-operative. Science could guarantee prosperity; and peace would follow plenty. The sole condition was loyalty to truth, the truth based upon research and verifiable by experiment. When scientists were allowed to regulate the art and morality, the politics and religion of mankind, the Golden Age would come. It is not difficult for one who was brought up in that faith to understand the confident optimism of the years before the War.

In such an atmosphere it is obvious that Christianity would receive little but contempt. The epigoni of Darwin had not been slow to press their attack upon it. His own wistful confession that his devotion to science had involved the atrophy of his love of music and of his sense of worship<sup>1</sup> was paraded as a call to militant unbelief: his humility was replaced by their arrogance; his speculations by their dogmas. Science became a cult if not a religion; and its devotees too often displayed the worst qualities of the sectarians and heresy-hunters of the fifth century. Such men would not admit, and perhaps could not recognise, the limitations of their technique; they lost the power to appreciate what they could not weigh or measure;

<sup>1</sup>*Life and Letters*, I, pp. 100-1 and p. 311.

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they failed to realise that mankind was giving to their theorisings a reverent and uncritical attention which was as disastrous as it was undeserved. Exaggerated versions of the Darwinian theory of the survival of the fittest or the Mendelian law of heredity, proclaimed by Nietzsche and popularised by Houston Chamberlain<sup>1</sup> and by Lothrop Stoddard,<sup>2</sup> led as we have lately seen to a glorification of war, to racial persecution which outrages the decencies and the intelligence of mankind, and to a religion of blood and soil, of the Aryan stock and the Nordic man.

That phase is passing away. Biologists are recognising that the living organism cannot be explained by analysis of its physical structure, since as a "whole" it exceeds the sum total of its analysable parts and contains elements not estimable by quantitative study. They are aware that though the fact of evolution is established its exact causes are at present far less known than they appeared to be a generation ago. They are looking for a technique which shall enable a study not of dead structure but of living process, and not of the organism only but of the organism in its environment; and are realising that truth cannot be fully investigated in a laboratory. Meanwhile mankind is beginning to affirm that science so long as it refuses to deal with imponderables cannot provide an adequate explanation of life; that agnosticism can give no foundation either for individual conduct or for civilisation; that the knowledge of truth, important as it is, is not the sole duty of man. If we are to learn the lessons that nature can teach, it must be by recovering the

<sup>1</sup>*Foundations of the Nineteenth Century.*

<sup>2</sup>*The Rising Tide of Colour*, etc. He with Houston Chamberlain is more truly the prophet of Nazism than Nietzsche (cf. M. D. Nicholas, *From Nietzsche down to Hitler*).

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sense of its wholeness and its value, the humility and the wonder which science in its conflict with religion too largely lost. Such scientists as are more than specialists and technicians are ready to welcome a wider and more synthetic attempt to interpret the nature and significance of the universe. Like the rest of mankind they realise that, unless man's moral and spiritual capacity can gain control of his vastly extended physical powers, civilisation may well employ the gifts of science to its own destruction.

Here then is an opportunity for the Church. Inherent in its essential faith is the conviction of the worth, the sacramental significance, the "mystery" of nature. In presenting the gospel to the heathen of the early days Christians were constrained to diminish and even deny this aspect of its fulness. We to-day have to take up the same task of evangelism. Largely outside the churches there has grown up a population which has discovered the absorbing interest of nature. If we can free ourselves from a distorted tradition, we can find a point of approach to such people by dwelling upon precisely those elements in the gospel which were inappropriate to the pagans of the second century. To do so would be to remedy the distortion and recover a lost article of our creed. We should re-establish faith in the universal energy of God and in that analogy between nature and revelation which Bishop Butler at the beginning of the modern age asserted. We should find that, as Origen maintained in a sentence quoted by the Bishop,<sup>1</sup> "the problems that confront the student of nature are the same as those that Christianity raises" and solves; and that as we look for God from the twofold standpoint, a knowledge of His Universe

<sup>1</sup>*Analogy* Introd., p. 5, from *Philocalia*.



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and of the Christ, our vision becomes steady and stereoscopic.

The recovery of a true valuation of nature by Christendom is an event to which we can look forward with hope. At the moment the demoralisation of Europe by the Great War and its sequels has produced a wave of reactionary obscurantist theology similar to that which accompanied the barbarian invasions of the fifth century. Now as then calamity has shattered not only man's complacency but his confidence. Pessimism and despair, for which there is no justification in Scripture or the Christian creed, produce an almost Manichean insistence upon the total depravity of the creature and the revival of a doctrine of God which by stress upon His transcendence in fact denies either that He is God or that He is the Father. In such times we may expect to find a recrudescence of superstition, of bibliolatry and demonology and irrationalism. It may be that the life of institutional Christendom is too feeble to resist such temptations, that Protestantism will slip back into the Calvinism of its youth, and that Catholicism has so long neglected its belief in nature and reason that it cannot now recover and restate it. But there remain a great multitude of Christian folk who, having been down into hell and suffered there the worst that life can do to them, have yet found that "in the valley of the shadow of death they need fear no evil," and in the strength of that faith can never despair. They will be constrained out of their own deepest experience to testify that when every earthly security is shattered and God alone remains then the Son of Man comes with power and a new age of love and fellowship, of joy in God's world and obedience to God's will, begins for them. By that experience their appreciation of nature has not

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been destroyed but reinforced. God in Christ vividly apprehended strips a man of everything: there is no room for any word save "God be merciful to me a sinner." All that Dr. Barth can tell us of the nothingness of man before God is true; and conversion is meaningless without it. But it is not the whole truth: for with the gift of Christ God does indeed give us all things—no longer to exploit or possess but to enjoy and to serve. There is no room for pessimism or despair in the theology of the Fourth Evangelist nor, I believe, in any fully mature Christian discipleship.

## VII

### THE NECESSITY OF HISTORY

WHEN we turn from nature, from  
"a sense sublime  
Of something far more deeply interfused,  
Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,  
And the round oceans, and the living air"  
to "The still, sad music of humanity,"<sup>1</sup>

the task of recovery becomes more difficult and adventurous. There is an age-old response in man to the wonder and terror of the universe. With it he is at once a kinsman and an alien; and his kinship is as inescapable as his estrangement. Out of the tension of this dual relationship his whole human and religious status has been achieved. Its paradox is his environment and his destiny. When he finds in the Incarnation an assurance that the paradox has been resolved, he cannot renounce his attachment to earth without surrendering that discovery. When he affirms that God and man are one Christ, he affirms the consequent value of the natural order.<sup>2</sup> Western Christendom,

<sup>1</sup>Wordsworth, *Lines composed above Tintern Abbey*.

<sup>2</sup>It is here that Dr. Barth is more consistent than Augustine; for Augustine held firmly to his opposition to Apollinarius and, illogically, is nearer to Antioch than Alexandria in Christology, whereas Dr. Barth is logically and obviously an Apollinarian. The Barthian view of nature is ultimately incompatible with a real belief in the manhood of Jesus.

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if it has distorted and evaded that affirmation, has never allowed itself to deny it.

But the importance of history is less fully recognised. Man has always been interested in the character and significance of the world around him: he has been less concerned with the meaning and value of his own recorded actions and life. As we have already shown Christianity entered into a tradition in which the importance of history as unveiling the acts of God was recognised and proclaimed. It renounced its inheritance almost as soon as the New Testament was written. Outside of mere chroniclers the only attempt to see history from this standpoint was that of Clement and Origen; and with them the importance of the divine education which they loved to trace in the story of humanity was only allegorical: they dwelt upon it not from any deep sense of its own worth but because from the phenomenal they hoped to pass to the contemplation of the ideal: they were Platonists and like their master could not formulate any concept of the organic connection between time and eternity. If as Christians they strove to ground the necessity of history upon belief in the love of God, their prepossession with metaphysics was constantly frustrating their endeavours: "history occurs because of Him, but it makes no difference to Him . . . if that is all that can be said, history is metaphysically unmeaning."<sup>1</sup>

So too when Augustine's thesis of the two cities which regarded history solely in relation to predestination, the fall, redemption and the end of the world was adopted as the proper framework for all treatment of the subject, his successors, Orosius or Otto of Freising, were merely concerned with plotting out the drama of the *Civitas Dei* in

<sup>1</sup>Archbishop Temple, *Nature, Man and God*, p. 435.

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the correct number of acts and scenes. That drama will be played to its appointed end, and human affairs apart from it have no more importance than the theatre in which the performance takes place. If the Church alone possessed any real value, if all mankind outside it were incapable of virtue and devoid of permanent significance, then no sense of the continuity or worth of history as a whole was possible. "In view of the constant interposition of Providence, the search for natural causation became needless and even impertinent."<sup>1</sup> The Church and the world existed side by side, but there could be no organic unity connecting them nor even any true interaction between them. The Church was the ark of salvation, and the struggles of the victims in the flood deserved no record.

When the concept of transcendence hardened into that of a rigid and inerrant authority secular history became necessarily unimportant:<sup>2</sup> its sole value was found in the incursions into it of the supernatural Dictator and in such continuous representation of Him as were furnished by an infallible Church or Bible. If God does not work through history but upon it and in spite of it, then the study of it may be a diverting amusement for the worldling; but no integral concept of it will be possible for the religious. The churchman will confine himself to collating those moments in which the divine has intruded into the story: he is concerned with the diamond, the clay in which it is embedded is worthless rubbish: "all human values are for him reduced to a single value, to firmness of Christian faith and to service of the Church."<sup>3</sup> That the records of

<sup>1</sup>Gooch, *History and Historians in the Nineteenth Century*, p. 1.

<sup>2</sup>cf. the discussion of this in relation to Augustine in Harnack, *History of Dogma*, V, pp. 126-7.

<sup>3</sup>Croce, *History of Historiography*, p. 210.

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the Middle Ages should be filled only with the legends of the saints and the rumours of miracles, and that in consequence secular history should be mere story-telling, is a natural result of a distorted view of the gospel.

This lack of any true sense of the character and value of history was not remedied by the advent of the New Learning. Indeed the Reformers influenced by the Augustinian concept of the two cities and by the Pauline reference to "the powers that be" adopted the strange position of ascribing to the natural orders a divinely sanctioned validity and to the State a legitimate authority, and yet of denying to them anything except a secular and for religion irrelevant status. It may be that Luther himself did not enjoin upon Christians the subservience as citizens to the State which has been characteristic of Lutheranism. But the belief that it is the State's duty to preserve its own interests and the Christian's duty to obey its behests has entered deeply into the theology and practice of Lutherans; and explains their refusal to recognise social reform or political righteousness as necessary elements in Christian discipleship. The denial of an analogy between nature and grace inevitably makes earthly citizenship and its history spiritually meaningless.

It is of course obvious that a deep and widespread interest in antiquity, especially in the literature and achievements of the classical period, was followed by a remarkable development of "chroniclers." It is not easy to exaggerate the debt which civilisation owes to such chroniclers and in Britain to those who like Holinshed and his contemporaries Grafton, Stow and the rest laboriously compiled their records. They supplied not only the raw material for Shakespeare, but in the careful lists of kings, ministers of state, lord mayors of London,

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bishops and magnates the data from which history could be created. But their concern was with compilation. They gathered from any available sources, and often after real research, information as to past and present events, displaying industry and on the whole impartiality but little critical insight or grasp of the significance of what they described. That Stow, the most competent and scholarly of them, was for several years suspect and molested in the belief that his historical work made him too favourable to Catholicism, is a warning of the danger to which any student who strove to interpret what he recorded was exposed. It is not surprising that under such conditions historians, if they could not or would not become pamphleteers, confined themselves to chronicling facts without drawing inferences from them. Only the churchmen in Catholic countries like Muratori or Mansi could gather materials without risk—provided their use of them was in defence of the tradition.

Even when the study of nature began to reassert itself and where the analogy between nature and grace was admitted, this study did not at once lead to a deeper appreciation of history. In the realm of nature inductive methods of observation and hypothesis were recognised as necessary, provided they were kept strictly within their proper frontiers. The early scientists if they were Christian strove valiantly to reconcile the results obtained by induction in the one sphere with the results prescribed by deduction and authority in the other; if they were so bold as to push their conclusions into the realm of grace, they did so at their peril and a collision with the Church could hardly be avoided; sooner than face it, most of them maintained a discreet and sceptical silence as to the bearing of their convictions upon religion. A thorough-going

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induction was only employed by "unbelievers" until quite recent times; for, since mankind belongs to both realms, any application of the inductive method to history was liable to provoke an outcry from the orthodox.

Hence it is that in the early historians this limitation of frontier is even more obvious. The Reformation and the controversies to which it gave rise naturally stimulated a concern for the study of the development of Christianity; for the Reformers had to explain their protest against Catholicism by showing how the Church had fallen away from Scripture. This was the task of Flacius and the *Magdeburg Centuries* published 1559-74, a work of real learning and vast scale, but concerned with theological controversy rather than history. Baronius' reply to it in the equally voluminous *Annales Ecclesiastici* (1588-1601) is more uncritical and not less tendentious in the defence of Catholicism; and the French scholars of the next century, Tillemont, Bossuet and Fleury, though men of massive learning and a measure of Gallican independence, are chroniclers with a purpose of edification rather than historians in the modern sense of the word. Even in the eighteenth century Mosheim to whose learning and diligence Gibbon pays full tribute and who lifted the subject out of the sphere of polemics is concerned rather with the biography of Christianity than with any attempt to relate the Church to its environment or to see it as part of the general process of human development or of the self-revelation of God. Both Protestants and Catholics still hold to the distinction between nature and grace, and isolate the supernatural story of religion from secular movements and events.

It is on this account not surprising that the first historian to break down this isolation drew from his study of



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the early Church a picture that was not only denounced as an attack upon the faith but is in fact prejudiced against it. Gibbon, who had horrified his father by joining the Roman Church at the age of sixteen and had then been sent to a Calvinist minister in Lausanne to be shown the error of his ways, can hardly have had a very favourable impression of Christianity before he began his monumental task; his coldness of temperament and comfortable circumstances prevented him from understanding it; and his diligence in research inevitably revealed how legendary was much of the traditional account of its origins and how biased the treatment of the evidence. Committed as he was by the scope of his subject to discuss the character and account for the influence of the Church, the apology with which he introduces the theme shows clearly that he realised how unconventional it was to break across the frontier which separated nature from revelation. For the greater part of his work a modern reader will feel that he is amazingly judicious and by no means unduly critical: but in his own day any suggestion of submitting religion to the ordinary tests which a student of history must apply seemed almost blasphemous; and though he insists that he is concerned only with the natural and not with the revealed aspect of the Church, and intimates that from the standpoint of revelation a different tale is told, it is obvious that he regards not only the supernatural but Christianity itself with contempt, and that his sympathies are with the *Aufklärung*, with the deism of his British contemporaries if not with the naturalism of his French friends. He is indeed a typical representative of the "people of discernment" to whom Butler had referred in the Advertisement to his *Analogy*;<sup>1</sup> and as such was

<sup>1</sup>Prefixed to the first edition.

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genuinely surprised to find how violent and widespread was the criticism of his work. If the champions of orthodoxy were not his match in scholarship, if even the ablest of them fell far short of him in knowledge of the evidence or ability to interpret it, yet his insensitiveness to religious experience led him to misjudge the strength not only of the ancient Church but of his Christian contemporaries and enabled them to put up a case against him.

Nevertheless the ensuing controversy, "a controversy which has continued to this day,"<sup>1</sup> delivered history from the reproach of being mere story-telling for the sake of amusement, edification, or success in controversy. It vindicated as the primary task of the historian the pursuit of accuracy and compelled a critical and first-hand study of sources which by this time were being vigorously collected. Of the steps by which this method was applied to classical records and thence, under fierce opposition, to the Old Testament, and so finally to the Gospels there is no need to speak here. The patient collection and sifting and scrutiny of data, involving as it must an examination and estimate of their sources and consequently a study of textual, linguistic and exegetical problems, is a primary condition of all historical research. If Christianity is to keep its place as a religion originating in and conditional upon certain events, it is obvious that its adherents must consent to the most stringent use of the historian's technique in relation to the evidence for those events. Otherwise its basic claim cannot be intellectually defended, and the gospel becomes at best a "fact of faith," a work of the imagination, a myth and not a record. That the Church even to-day is so ready to identify research with infidelity is proof of the extent to which Christianity

<sup>1</sup>Foakes Jackson, *A History of Church History*, p. 163.

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had come to be regarded as supernatural, indeed magical, in character. That recent movements should threaten to revive such irrationalism and even to jettison the results of a century of scholarship under the illusion that liberalism is doomed, is a curious comment upon the extent to which they fall short of an incarnational theology.

But the collection of data can only be the prolegomenon to history. We cannot escape the further task of selecting from them and disclosing their significance. Here, as every historian knows, the difficulty of his task begins. For to undertake it involves reference to a standard of values; and however objective the intention, the standard adopted will consciously or unconsciously determine the choice, arrangement and interpretation of the material. However exact our knowledge of a period, however complete the records, however unbiased the study, a catalogue of detailed happenings, set out without any design except to heap together the largest possible accumulation, will be as unlike history as a builder's yard is to a cathedral—indeed less so, for the builder if he has not arranged his stock has at least selected it, and selected it for a specific purpose.

It is somewhat surprising that more attention has not been paid to this matter, and that even to-day historians are so divided as to the character and significance of their work. Is history an art or a science; an account of the past or a sign-post for the future; a record of great men and great moments or an investigation of the obscure and deep-seated energies which find expression in the lives of common folk? Is the historian to mortify or to indulge his personal equation; to be a dramatist or an economist, a politician or a moralist, an anatomist or a preacher?

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It is easy to name among our contemporaries those who would select one or other of these alternatives, and those who would wish to be both and all. We have certainly votaries of Clio the Muse—and their work does her credit; researchers content to dig out and exhibit facts which have little interest save in themselves; propagandists whose histories are avowedly proof-texts of political theories; psychologists determined to strip the glamour from heroism or to find in the tale of an epoch the vindication of a theory of instincts; sceptics, whose intention seems to be to demonstrate not only that man's striving is vanity and vexation of spirit but that his story is "a tale told by an idiot"; and evangelists whose danger is to read back into the records what they profess to read out of them. For the plain man such disagreement among the doctors is bewildering. He realises that pure objectivity is impossible: he knows, from experience of the daily press, that suppression and suggestion can make lies look true: he discovers, if he reads more than one historian, that the same event can be interpreted very variously: yet he believes that the proper study of mankind is man and values history as the raw material of aesthetic, political, moral and religious wisdom. It is a pity that the historians do not make up their minds on the questions which he feels bound to ask them; for when he has discovered their standpoint, he is apt to assume, not always unreasonably, that if it differs from his own it colours and for him vitiates their work. No one likes to find himself being indoctrinated without acknowledgment.

It must be admitted that the progress of history in the past century has made this matter of its function one of vital importance. Philosophy, as represented at least by Hegel, had become conscious of the new historical sense

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and of the concept of development which were characteristic of the time. The *Philosophy of History* not only laid down the familiar principle of thesis, antithesis, synthesis, but insisted that every happening, past or present, is a process of the realisation of Spirit—"not only not without God but essentially His work."<sup>1</sup> But despite the enthusiasm of his followers,<sup>2</sup> neither the schema nor its underlying principle had much immediate effect upon historians. So long as their work was mainly concerned with the reigns of kings and the annals of war, its romantic interest sufficed: if it fostered a snobbishness, nationalism, self-esteem that have had a baneful effect upon events, it was not consciously designed for that end. When the interest shifted from the "dynastic" to the "constitutional," and Whigs like Hallam and Macaulay were answered by Tories like Alison and Napier, the question of "tendency" became more explicit. When Green called his first book *A Short History of the English People*, he promised the entrance of a fresh outlook<sup>3</sup>—and to some extent fulfilled his title. Environmental factors, and especially geography and climate had already been emphasised first by Bodin in the seventeenth, then by Montesquieu<sup>4</sup> in the eighteenth, Heeren<sup>5</sup> in the early nineteenth century and with much more public attention by Buckle<sup>6</sup> in 1857. But it was not until Marx's

<sup>1</sup>Bohn's edition, p. 477, cited by Lyman, *The Meaning and Truth of Religion*, p. 321.

<sup>2</sup>Especially the theologians of Tübingen.

<sup>3</sup>Though Condorcet, *Esquisse d'un Tableau historique des progrès de l'Esprit humain* had in 1795 opened up this line of treatment and emphasised the importance of the masses for history.

<sup>4</sup>Especially *Considerations sur les causes de la grandeur des Romains et de leur decadence*.

<sup>5</sup>Especially *Reflections on the Politics, Intercourse and Trade of Ancient Peoples*.

<sup>6</sup>*History of Civilisation in England*; positivism and evolution were then "in the air."

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work became known that the importance of standpoint and standards was thrust to the front.

Whatever be the final verdict upon that great name, whether we are content to reckon Marx a man of his time who took his ideas from hints given by his predecessors, by Hegel and Feuerbach and Ricardo, and "went one better," or see in him one of the prophetic revolutionaries of the world, he cannot be denied the credit of having fastened upon a neglected and for the historian vitally important factor and elaborated a patient and convincing demonstration of its significance. His influence arouses to-day such passion, and the "Materialistic Conception of History" is so misleading a title for his work, that we can hardly expect to estimate his achievement fairly. If in his early utterances, he declared the economic factor to be the sole determinant of man's consciousness and development, thus reducing humanity to the level of the robot, he and Engels alike came to realise the impossibility of this exclusive attitude and in later writings allowed other factors both physical and mental to have a contributory value. In any case his claim to greatness does not rest upon the exact extent to which his interpretation of history is correct so much as upon the fact that he first demonstrated the continuity of its process and revealed the futility of studying human experience except in terms of the interaction of the organism and its environment. He strove to see the evidence as a whole, breaking away from the merely catastrophic or episodic views which had characterised his predecessors and striving to disclose and analyse the sequence of cause and effect. What Darwin did for biology, Marx was already doing for history.

There is indeed as we might expect a real parallelism between the development of the two fields of study.

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Biology had been traditionally catastrophic. Species had been created at a definite epoch: the deluge had destroyed vast numbers of them: the remainder had spread over the earth again: their structure and relationships were fixed: the scientists' business was to name, define and classify them. So too history had been conceived as the description of certain outstanding individuals and events, largely unaccountable and disconnected, even if divisible into separate and isolated periods; "Universal History" said Carlyle,<sup>1</sup> "is at bottom the History of the Great Men who have worked here." It was, as Boswell called it, a sort of almanack;<sup>2</sup> and the business of the historian was to fill in the vacant dates. Gradually in both fields there came a sense of drama and movement: ideas of acquired characteristics and of the influence of habits and of locality were suggested by Buffon (in spite of ecclesiastical stricture) by Goethe, Geoffroy St. Hilaire, Erasmus Darwin and by Lamarck not less than by Montesquieu, Heeren or Buckle. But the tradition held its ground in spite of Lyell and Chambers<sup>3</sup> until the appearance of *The Origin of Species* and the interpretation of the whole evolutionary process in terms of the struggle for existence. Then for the first time the march of life could be seen as continuous. Darwin unlike Marx (and some of his own successors) was too wise to claim a monopoly for his principle: but the discovery of it made a unity of treatment possible.

In biology scientific opinion was ready for Darwin and his work was immediately followed. In history Marx was too far in advance of his time and too extreme in the early

<sup>1</sup>*Heroes and Hero Worship*, p. 1.

<sup>2</sup>*Life of Johnson*, I, p. 559.

<sup>3</sup>Author of the anonymous *Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation* to which Darwin pays tribute.

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expression of his views to provoke any immediate movement. Indeed although *Das Kapital*, the third volume of which only appeared in 1894, produced an effect in socialist and radical circles, his influence upon historians was almost negligible until after the Russian revolution. It is significant that when in 1913 G. P. Gooch published his massive volume *History and Historians in the Nineteenth Century*, not only is Marx's name never mentioned, but Heeren and Buckle<sup>1</sup> are barely alluded to and the importance of tracing the economic and sociological connection of events is virtually ignored. History as thus interpreted is hardly more than an accurate chronicle of happenings, a record of great men, of dramatic episodes, of political changes and of national development.

Yet by the close of the century *Kulturgeschichte* had begun to challenge the dominant tradition and to emphasise the importance of the circumstances, material, psychological and social, out of which events develop. Lamprecht's great work<sup>2</sup> and the controversy that it created<sup>3</sup> stimulated a search for neglected factors that has sometimes been almost grotesque in its claims for their pre-eminence, but is at least evidence of the desire for an integral outlook. Immunity to disease, racial purity, sexual restrictions, education, means of transport, scientific progress—these and many others have been invoked as decisive; and history has been interpreted in the light of them. Of their importance there can be no question. A historian studying the England of the nineteenth century in relation to the general life of mankind would rightly fasten upon Maurice's foundation of Queen's College for

<sup>1</sup>For the fate of Buckle, a pioneer similar to but less extreme than Marx cf. J. M. Robertson, *Buckle and his Critics*.

<sup>2</sup>Expounded in *Die Kulturhistorische Methode*.

<sup>3</sup>cf. Gooch, l.c., pp. 588-93.



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women, Darwin's writing of the *Origin of Species*, Starley's invention of the safety bicycle,<sup>1</sup> Lister's researches into antiseptis and Ross' discovery of the malaria-carrying *Anopheles* as matters far more important than the Reform Bill or the Crimean War, the statesmanship of Disraeli or the character of Queen Victoria. But to recognise them as such implies a standpoint different from that of *Heroes and Hero-Worship* or indeed of any previous students; a standpoint which sees humanity in relation to its environment, thinks in terms of collective development rather than of individual eminence, and owes its recognition more largely to Marx than to any other. To him, as to Darwin in biology, is due the credit for leading us from a catastrophic or episodic study of events to a realisation of their continuity and interdependence and to the attempt to see history as a whole.

The stress which this movement of historical study lays upon human solidarity and the collective aspect of human activities, has of course been fostered by the general trend of thought and life in the past half-century. As has often been pointed out,<sup>2</sup> the swing back from individualism has been characteristic of the whole intellectual, social, political and industrial life of mankind in recent times; and we are all aware how profoundly this tendency has entered not only into the constitution of many countries but into the life and thought of our day. Totalitarianism is not confined to Russia or Germany or Italy. The regimentation of populations, the standardising of environment, the creation of a "mass mind" have been

<sup>1</sup>J. Kemp Starley invented the first safety-bicycle in 1885. This made travel easy for both sexes and so revolutionised village-life. Yet Starley is not even mentioned in the *Cambridge Modern History* or in the *Dictionary of National Biography*.

<sup>2</sup>Notably by Dicey, *Law and Opinion in England during 19th Century*.

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everywhere carried to a pitch which threatens all that the centuries of individualism have won, and must make any believer in democracy or liberty gravely apprehensive. So far as history is concerned, the influence of rival ideologies, based upon the respective importance of the economic or of the racial factor, seems to be marshalling humanity into warring camps, and creating ways of life which deny any adequate recognition of the worth of personality and are radically inconsistent with any form of Christian faith. This, if it does not recommend particular historical theories to our approval, at least demonstrates the vast importance of a right appreciation of history, and the danger which the Church's degradation of it involves. We shall not meet that danger by ignoring the importance of man's environment or heredity, nor by repudiating collectivism, nor by relapsing into an otherworldly quietism and the revival of transcendental superstitions. There is too much truth in Marx, or even in Rosenberg, for them to be overthrown by a mere negative; and the mind of our day has become too well aware of the significance of history to be attracted by a Christianity which rejects its importance. The Church can only stand up against them if it recovers its own essential gospel and insists that they fail not because they attach too high an importance to history, but because in ascribing its development chiefly to economic or racial factors they are falling into an error which degrades it.

These factors are important; and in disclosing their importance historians have made a real contribution to our knowledge. From the thesis of the free and heroic individual to the antithesis of the solid and rigidly conditioned mass is, at least to those who like a dialectic schema, a proper and natural reaction. The change

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has brought coherence into our concept of history; has driven us to a search after first principles; has foreshadowed (even if it has been mistaken in supplying) a holistic treatment of the subject. What is needed is a synthesis which shall do justice both to freedom and to determinism, to the individual and to the collective, to the organism and to its environment.

It need not be argued here that the ideologies whether Communist or Nazi are inadequate, or that human beings are personal and cannot be treated as the by-products of their environment or explained in terms either of their class-status or of their germ-plasm. History which measures achievement by the standard of mythical figures like the proletarian or the Aryan and selects as important only such events as foster one or other of these myths hardly deserves the name; for it can only be produced by falsification of the facts. Stalin is no more a pure Marxist than Hitler is a pure Nordic—though if they were what they claim to be, that would not prove their doctrines to be true. Economics and genetics are reputable sciences, until they are elevated to the plane of religion: then the historian will smile at the weight which is undeservedly laid upon them.

Nevertheless the choice of standpoint and standards has become urgent if history is not to be brought into disrepute by being thus openly exploited in the interests of political propaganda. It is useless to declaim against the ideologists if the only alternative to their schematisings is a return to story-telling. History properly appreciated has a profound importance for mankind: of that we are all nowadays convinced. It supplies if we use it rightly the data by which individuals and society can interpret their experience, understand their past and estimate their

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future. It reveals, to the believer, the ways of God with His children. As such its study should not be determined by the personal preferences and prejudices of the historian, nor in the interests of social, national or ecclesiastical advantage. Nor is it enough for him to record what is objectively true: he must select his material by a true standard of values, and estimate its significance in relation to a true concept of man's highest welfare. The historian is surely abusing his vocation if he does not constantly strive to sift and interpret his material in the light of the eternal: otherwise he drops to the level of a propagandist. Whether he calls himself an artist or a scientist he must not use a criterion lower than beauty or truth; and rightly regarded, the two are for him one and the same. Moreover since his work is not with abstractions but with persons his standard also must be not less than personal. Are we not driven to the conclusion that his example is to be found in the ancient practice of those who wrote history from the standpoint of faith in God, a practice to which Lord Acton<sup>1</sup> approached perhaps more completely than any recent historian?

For the Christian Dr. Temple's definition "The eternal is the ground of the historical and not *vice-versa*; but the relation is necessary not contingent—essential not incidental"<sup>2</sup>—a definition reached after a careful survey of alternative positions—sums up and restates the implications of the gospel. No other view is consistent with faith in the Incarnation, or able to do justice to the historical event which originated and disclosed that faith. If in the person of the Son of Man God has "visited and redeemed His people," then the history of Israel as the

<sup>1</sup>cf. Gooch, l.c., pp. 379-93.

<sup>2</sup>*Nature, Man and God*, p. 448.

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New Testament claims and indeed the whole previous history of humanity as Justin and Origen insist are a preparation for that event. It must be seen as a moment—the culminating and illuminative moment—in an age-old and world-wide drama—a drama in which nothing can be dismissed as irrelevant to it; as the characteristic and representative expression of principles inherent in the whole process of creation; as the criterion by which past and future are given their true significance. From it history derives its vital importance as recording not only the adventures of men but the self-manifestation of God. “What God has cleansed, call not thou common” is true of a wider context than that of Jewish food-laws or racial privilege. For the Christian the historical is the symbol and instrument of the eternal; and as such is a chief source from which theology must draw its data.

Such conclusions ought to be a mere platitude to those who have accepted the gospel and pondered on its meaning. They ought indeed to be obvious to anyone who is not prepared to regard life as purely illusory or meaningless. For we ourselves are within the realm of history, and whatever happens to us, our ecstasies and imaginations, are material for history. It may be, as the mystics seem to testify, that in certain high experiences of the spirit, mankind can “see God face to face”; that there are occasions of direct and unmediated communion. The Christian who accepts the supreme revelation as “in Christ” will treat such claims as suspect—else there would be no need for an incarnation. He will justly observe that the mystics who make them derive their descent from the Neo-platonism of Plotinus or the Oriental dualism of Dionysius the Areopagite—in either case from a tradition that rejects a fully incarnational and sacra-

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mental theology. But if suspicious he need not be dogmatic. The matter is one on which doctors and epistemologists disagree; and in any case we shall not insist that God is bound to His sacraments. But, even if the claims are allowed, the incidence of these experiences falls within the sphere of history; their interpretation can only be in terms that history supplies; and it is by history that their effects are disclosed.

That such convictions of the character and scope of historical studies are not confined to those who profess the Christian faith is clear from the very remarkable sentences in which Bury maintained that history and philosophy could not be separated. "If the philosophy of history is not illusory, history means a disclosure of spiritual reality in the fullest way in which it is cognisable to us in these particular conditions. And, on the other hand, the possibility of an interpretation of history as a movement of reason, disclosing its nature in terrestrial circumstances, seems the only hypothesis on which the postulate of 'history for its own sake' can be justified as valid."<sup>1</sup> Such words, coming from one who was by no means friendly to Christianity, and eagerly desired to vindicate the scientific status of historical studies, may well encourage us to hope not only that the age of story-telling is over, but that the strictest students are recognising that the one remedy against propaganda is the acceptance of standards ultimately religious in character. If this be so, the Church has an opportunity to promote an integral view of events and to propose criteria by which their significance can be estimated.

Unfortunately, as we have seen, the full consequences of

<sup>1</sup>*Selected Essays of J. B. Bury* (ed. H. V. Temperley), pp. 46-7, quoted and discussed by N. Sykes "The Study of History" in *History*, 1934, pp. 103 ff.

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the gospel were never realised by the Church; and, outside the New Testament, there was little attempt to see history as a continuous record of the acts of the living God. In consequence it will be very much harder for the Church to correct the distortions of its theology in this respect than in regard to nature. The need to do so is urgent; for we can only counteract ideologies based upon a mistaken interpretation of history by substituting for them a more truly historical system. The opportunity is hardly less obvious; for in these days of relativity, when man's arrogant demand for finality is being at last abandoned, the value of the experience expressed in history is being generally appreciated. But the difficulties arising within the Church itself from the lack of precedent as well as from specific and powerful opposition make the task doubtful of accomplishment.

The lack of precedent need not in itself be serious. Christendom has in the Scriptures of both Testaments an example of the valuation of history for which we have been arguing—a valuation which however impaired by racial exclusiveness or restriction of outlook tries to estimate the significance of events by the standard of the divine purpose. To a modern and sophisticated historian it will no doubt seem absurd to suggest that the naive anthropomorphisms of the books of Samuel or Kings, and still less the heavy and exaggerative moralisings of Chronicles, or even the graphic supernaturalism of the Acts can supply a model. He has not forgotten that the Augustinian scheme, dominant from Orosius to Bossuet, professed to do what we are now proposing—with results hardly satisfactory; and has no desire to return to theological bondage. That is a proper protest. No one would suggest that the language and technique of the Bible

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should be slavishly imitated, or that scholars of the twentieth century should accept the dualistic mentality of the Middle Ages. But if "the eternal is the ground of the historical," history will not be rightly interpreted except *sub specie eternitatis*; and it is from Scripture that the habit of so interpreting it can be learnt. In Christian schools, colleges and churches it ought to be possible to carry over the standpoint, made familiar by the Bible, to the treatment of those other, and less particularised, acts of God which constitute the whole scope of historical studies, and thus to build up a mode of selection and testing which would be consistent with the belief that what matters most in human affairs is the effort to live eternally.

Opposition by Christians, based upon a dualism which denies the significance of secular events, is at the moment a larger obstacle. The demonic scale of the evil and the suffering of our time have inevitably produced the sort of reaction which previous periods of calamity have made familiar. Men who have passed through the shattering experiences of the last twenty-five years would be insensitive indeed if they did not gain an insight into the power of sin denied to more prosperous periods; and with sin a deeper appreciation of the transcendent majesty of God and of the tremendous fact of judgment. If they are themselves immediately involved in these calamities, if they have passed through the hell of war and known its terrors in their own bodies, they are likely to have found in it a conviction of the reality and power of God which outweighs their sense of horror and despair. But if they have watched it from a relatively safe detachment, their sensibilities will have been harrowed and their imaginations tortured, and they will have had no compensating



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experience to save them from a total denunciation of the world and all its ways: they are almost bound to contrast the changeable with the changeless, and when mankind reveals its monstrous cruelty and lust to insist that God is "utterly other," that His ways are hidden and incomprehensible, that in mankind is neither any good nor any capacity for responding to or co-operating with his Creator, and that history is irrelevant to religion.

In view of the influence of the Barthian theology upon the post-war generation in Europe and America this point is so important that it must be emphasised even at the risk of personal references inappropriate to a theological discussion. It is a matter of common knowledge that those who have not themselves suffered but have had to watch the sufferings of others are much more likely to regard suffering as an outrage upon creation than those who have known it at first hand. If Dr. Barth had been himself in the trenches instead of ministering to a congregation in Switzerland, I do not believe that his theology would have taken its present form. If he had known, as I have known, the direct effects of gas and bombardment, if he had experienced the loneliness, the horror, the cowardice, the self-abasement and won through to the conversion, the faith and joy that followed it, he would recognise that his theology for all its power and sincerity is as one-sided as his exegesis of St. Paul. To his greatness, his passion, his courage no tribute of mine is needed: as a Christian I am not fit to be compared with him at any point. But in this one thing I can claim a right to be heard: I have been down into hell—to the bottom of the pit where nothing but shame and pain and fear remain—and have found God there; and I think that he is too good

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a man to have known except in imagination what that means.

Is it indecent to add that when my friends who have never known the stark facts of evil as I knew them in war, talk about my theology as a tolerant and optimistic liberalism,<sup>1</sup> I find it hard not to smile? Tolerant I hope it is; but if optimism means turning a blind eye to one's own sin or to human wickedness, then their innocence delights me.

On this matter of sin there must be no misunderstanding. The sort of liberalism, too prevalent a generation ago, which ignored the gravity of moral issues, deprecated the sense of personal guilt, felt no need for conversion, reduced Christ's work to that of amiable exhortation, and treated God as "a tame confederate purveyor to our appetites," deserves all the condemnation that Dr. Barth gives to it. A world which had come to a complacent belief in its own automatic progress, which regarded penitence as morbid and faith as unmanly, needed and received the drastic surgery of calamity. If it had forgotten God, it had to be reminded that to do so is to prefer death to life. That the agony of war and all that has followed it have made us ready for what Dr. Barth is teaching us of man's creaturehood and corruption, of the mode and cost of his redemption, of the inevitable collapse of civilisations which are not based upon God's creative, redemptive and sustaining love—this is matter for humiliation and thankfulness, humiliation that we professing Christians should have made such suffering necessary, thankfulness that the

<sup>1</sup>cf. Oldham and Visser t'Hooft *The Church and its Functions in Society*, W. M. Horton *Contemporary English Theology*, pp. 96-9. The point that I am making was admirably expressed by Canon B. K. Cunningham in a sermon before the University of Cambridge, "It is easy to follow Dr. Barth if you are living in the security of a Senior Combination Room."

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stark helplessness of our state should have found its prophet.

But that is not all. We who have been down into hell do not ignore its horror or our own guilt when we assert that in it and in spite of it God is not "overcome of evil"; that the world is His world; that nature and history have their origin and worth in Him; that He is Himself involved in the struggle and assuring us of victory; and that in revealing Himself incarnate He has taken manhood into partnership, indeed into unity, with Himself. If calamity recalls us to a knowledge of sin, it recalls us also to the reality of redemption. "*Eccovi l'uom ch' è stato all' Inferno*, See there is the man that was in hell," said the Veronese of Dante: and Carlyle's comment is apposite "Commedias that come out *divine* are not accomplished otherwise."<sup>1</sup> The world is not less God's world, history is not less the record of His acts, because we are learning to see the awful gravity of the issues at stake in it.

It is to this that the theology of crisis should lead us—not to a denunciation of secular effort as irrelevant nor to the acceptance of a godless and irredeemable State over against a pietistic and other-worldly Church, but to an insistence that no sphere of human activity is or can be purely secular and that everywhere there is need for penitence and faith since all things, secular and sacred, work together for good to them that love God, and will work only for disaster on any other terms. Such a conviction is as far removed from a shallow and optimistic humanism as it is from a transcendentalism which negates the worth of human effort, sunders nature from grace, and must ultimately reduce faith to an irrational super-

<sup>1</sup>*Heroes and Hero-worship* (ed. Traill, 1904) p. 92.

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stition. It is the conviction which will sooner or later enable Christendom to formulate a synthesis out of the thesis and antithesis of liberalism and Barthianism.

But meanwhile Protestant theology is being swept into a denial not only of its liberal and humanistic inheritance,<sup>1</sup> but of any recognition of the worth of nature and history. This reaction, though its main strength is in the Reformed and Lutheran churches of the Continent, in the more Calvinistic members of the Church of Scotland, and among a few of the younger preachers and students of England and America, is at present having a definite effect in delaying the social and evangelistic work of the churches and fostering the general sense of defeatism and despair. Those who refuse to recognise any analogy or continuity between nature and grace are constrained to regard political or economic activity as irrelevant to religion. In dismissing as demonic or Satanic the conflicting ideologies that are struggling for supremacy in Europe, they refuse to recognise in them any points of value or of possible contact with Christianity. Logically they ought to advocate a total withdrawal from the world of government or of production; for if that world is necessarily outside the order of grace, the Christian can only live in it by accepting a dual allegiance. Actually they seem willing to denounce all that has been done to christianise the social order, and unable to supply any sort of guidance as to Christian conduct in relation to it. The more extreme advocates of transcendentalism have in fact re-erected those barriers between religion and life which it has been the greatness of the past century to assail. Christendom

<sup>1</sup>cf. C. J. Cadoux, *The Case for Evangelical Modernism*, for a valuable protest.

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is once more being regarded as rigidly confined within the domain of Scripture and the exercise of particular "religious" activities—a supernatural city in the midst of a hostile world, beleaguered by the devilish forces of scholarship and science, statesmanship and social service, betrayed by those of its citizens who would fain believe that no human beings are irredeemable and no human institutions irreformable, and a prey to the factions which a claim to exclusive sanctity inevitably provokes.

Even in its less extreme forms the reaction has had serious consequences. A good illustration of this can be drawn from its effects upon the subject of foreign missions. In 1927 at the International Missionary Council at Jerusalem the whole weight of opinion welcomed the new outlook upon the task of the Christian in presenting the gospel to adherents of other religions: it was agreed that a sympathetic understanding of their history and beliefs was essential, that points of contact with them should be recognised, and that where possible their value as real attempts to seek after God and real evidence of His self-revelation should be affirmed. When three years later the American Report *Re-thinking Missions* was published, it was generally felt that though many of the proposals were a fulfilment of the policy advocated at Jerusalem the liberal tendency of its theology went far beyond the findings of the Conference. The book was certainly provocative and exaggerated in its humanism, but the transcendentalist reaction was then beginning to make itself strongly felt. In 1938 when Dr. H. Kraemer's book, *The Christian Message in a non-Christian World*, appeared, it was clear that he repudiated the spirit and method not only of the American Report but of the Jerusalem Council. His theology

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compelled him to revert to the older and traditional view which saw in Islam and Buddhism only heathenism and irrelevance. "Neither within us, in reason or conscience, nor outside us, in nature or in human history, will he allow us to look for any light to guide us to God. That light he would have us seek only in the Bible."<sup>1</sup> If the Church is to revert to this outlook, it will surrender all the best achievements of the last century and find itself increasingly rejected by those who have the courage not to desire an escape from the business of living. If God is God, universalism and integration must be characteristic of any real religion. If Christ is divine, His nature must be representative not exclusive, and His uniqueness that of the first-born of all creation rather than of an alien intruder. If the Holy Spirit is the "giver of life," then to affirm His action in the inspiration of the Old Testament and to deny it in the inspiration of the Buddha or Socrates is to return to the arbitrary superstitions of fundamentalism. No doubt the sort of liberalism which dominated Protestant theology on the Continent at the opening of the century ignored one of the essential moments of religion: it is a pity that the reaction against it should now not only ignore but repudiate the other. That this antithesis will provide the condition for a synthesis and will itself pass away is certain. Meanwhile it constitutes a grave hindrance to an effective renewal of Christendom.

Yet, despite the temporary difficulties of a time of transition and of consequent contradictions, the recovery of a sense of the importance of history holds the promise of a synthetic theology which shall both restore to us the

<sup>1</sup>E. C. Dewick reviewing Kraemer in *Modern Churchman*, Nov. 1938, p. 423.

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proportion of the faith and arise out of the antithesis of recent years. Liberalism, fostered by the scientific and humanist movements, has given to the Church the desire for an integral interpretation of experience: we have learnt from it the need to see life steadily and see it whole. The reaction, reminding us that liberalism without a gospel has neither criterion by which to test its achievements nor goal to which to direct its intention, has recalled us to the revelation contained in Scripture and culminating in Christ. At present the two movements are seen as antagonists, and Christendom is distracted between them. They are in reality complementary, each emphasising an essential element in an outlook and way of life that transcends and fulfils them—an outlook expressed in the original Christian *kerygma* and embodied in the community of the Apostolic Church. If we can go forward to a realisation of this outlook, the present distress may prove to be the birth-pangs rather than the death-rattle of civilisation.

## VIII

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THE degradations of nature and history are in fact distortions from which the Church as it recovers its understanding of the gospel ought to be able to emancipate itself. The need for reinterpretation of its message is being forced upon it by the pressure of the times. Not only has the widespread appreciation of nature and the growing conviction of the worth of history opened the eyes of many Christians to the defects of their tradition and if they care for evangelism constrained them to break away from it to an earlier and truer presentation: but there are abundant signs that even in theology the stage is set for a synthetic and integrating movement.

The challenge of Marxism and of Nazism must plainly be met. The Christian cannot meet them, if he has any deep belief in God, without realising that they are not arbitrary diabolisms, but in each case a nemesis upon Christendom for its own failure. A truly religious attitude to history would have cut the ground from under the Marxist movement; for it would have provided a deeper, more searching and more revolutionary analysis of man's nature and development. Similarly a more sympathetic appreciation of the revelation of God in nature would have meant co-operation with the scientists instead of hostility and mutual damage; and the exag-



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generations of the place of war in the struggle for existence and of the religion of blood and soil would have been avoided. It is after all the Church's fault, if being possessed of the truth she fails to understand and commend it; for the world is so ordered that truth prevails in it. The attitude which denounces all opposition as demonic and thanks God that we are not as these sinners, is Pharisaical not Christian. We must ask ourselves in all humility why it is that these rival ideologies have become so formidable, what is the secret of their influence, and how we have failed to meet the human needs which they claim to satisfy. To do so is to be forced to recognise the deficiencies of our rendering of the gospel and to recover the appreciation of the value of nature and history which is inherent in the experience and faith of the Apostolic age.

As it is, the challenge has called out from representatives of all the great Christian systems on the Continent a typical answer. From the Holy Orthodox Church Berdyaev's *Freedom and the Spirit*; from Roman Catholicism Maritain's *True Humanism*; from Calvinism Barth's *Commentary on the Romans*; from Lutheranism Aulén's *Christus Victor*—these books which are perhaps the most familiar in each type reveal how stimulating the impact of direct attack has been. Each is at first sight not only a worthy reinterpretation of the tradition to which it belongs, but a fresh and valiant attempt to renovate that tradition as against the new assaults upon it. Each is the work of a great Christian and a great student, competent to present in its finest form the essential meaning of his inherited convictions. Berdyaev who to the Anglo-Saxon is certainly the most relevant and illuminating is indeed an *Origenes redivivus*—and Origen is at once the most profound and the most modern

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of early theologians. Maritain, if his enthusiasm for St. Thomas has something of the neophyte's naiveté, does justice to the massive and consistent wisdom of Scholasticism. Barth, true to his ancestry, returns to Scripture and, even if his own position is rather that of the Paulinism of Geneva than of St. Paul the Apostle, asserts only the more emphatically on that account the tremendous realities of sin and of redemption. Aulén cutting as Luther did through the sophistications of dogma brings us near to the simple and overwhelming experience of Atonement even if his claim that this was the faith of the patristic age is hardly convincing. They are great contributors to the reaffirmation of the faith, great fore-runners of the Word which shall be born for us out of the tribulation of the time—the Word which shall be both old and new. But that Word has not yet been spoken.

The fact is (and our debt to these great writers and the schools of thought represented by them must not be allowed to conceal it) that they are too deeply embedded in their several traditions to be able to make a sufficiently radical restatement of the gospel. It is not enough to take us back to John of Damascus or even to Origen, to Thomas Aquinas or Luther or Calvin, and bid us face our new tasks in their spirit. History does not repeat itself; and all these were men of their own day applying an already distorted theology to a concrete situation: neither the theology nor the situation is alive for us, nor can the spirit of those ancient heroes be our spirit. We can learn from all of them, can find in them data which must be used in their due place in the proportion of the faith. But criticism must be more drastic; the surgery which dissects away accretions and reveals distortions must cut more deep; and the limitations imposed upon us

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by our own place in one or other tradition must be more frankly admitted. We need for the task those who can stand away from the greatness of their inheritance and experience again what no one of our chosen writers fully realises, the new life of *agape* and *koinonia* which the Apostles called the gift of the Holy Ghost.

This brings us to the third and final phase of our inquiry. It is precisely because ever since the fourth century the Church has been constituted after the fashion of an imperial and totalitarian State, accepting the will to power and identifying its own organisation with the organic life of the body of Christ, that the task of the Christian who would seek to recover the gospel is so insuperable. How difficult it is may be best seen from the book which goes nearest to presenting a true picture of the scope and quality of that task—Professor Macmurray's recent volume *The Clue to History*. That he is right in contrasting the religious and integral outlook of Jesus and of the Scriptures with the dualistic tradition which now claims the title Christianity seems plain. That he succeeds in expressing the essential features of the intention of Jesus, is to me at least not less plain. But in the details of his analysis he reveals what in his opening pages he admits, that for anyone employing the habit of mind formed by the tradition it is hardly possible to avoid obscurities, exaggerations and over-simplifications. He has done great service in exposing the extent and indicating the sources of the contrast between the religion of Jesus and the Christian systems of to-day. But it is perhaps fair to ask whether his rigid categories, Jewish, Greek, Roman, do not conflict with his primary thesis that mankind is inescapably committed to an equality which transcends all racial barriers. We shall

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recognise that distortions as far-reaching as the dualisms which he condemns have taken place; that in broad outline the tendencies to which he draws attention are characteristic of special peoples and periods; but we must question whether such generalisations are compatible with the diversities and fundamental kinship of the human family. As will have been seen, my own position is in the main very similar to his;<sup>1</sup> but I should attach less weight to Jewish, Greek, or Roman temperaments and more to the circumstances under which men of varying races strove to deal with, and too often made disastrous concessions to, the changes in their environment.

But whether or no his analysis is correct, his main conclusion that "from the time when Christianity accepted the position of the official religion of the Roman Empire, it ceased to be possible to identify Christianity with the Church"<sup>2</sup> is surely sound. Nor so long as Christians accept and maintain the status then bestowed does there seem any likelihood, or indeed possibility of a real recovery. For this status determines our way of living as Christians, and the way of life determines the theology.<sup>3</sup> Membership in an organised and institutional church whose preservation and aggrandisement are accepted as an axiomatic obligation, whose officers transform difference of function into caste-separateness and identify it with a claim to power and prestige, whose traditions enforce a sharp distinction between the Church

<sup>1</sup>W. M. Horton, *Contemporary English Theology*, pp. 97-100, points out this similarity. But he is influenced largely by the fact that we both contributed to a popular volume *Christianity and the Crisis*, and fails to recognise that if we reach similar conclusions it is by widely differing routes.

<sup>2</sup>*l.c.*, p. 146.

<sup>3</sup>I cannot accept Macmurray's strictures upon theology—due largely to the Greek derivation of the word (p. 132): if it be defined as "thinking about God and all things together" it is surely what he would have us do.

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and the world, the clergy and the laity, the sacred and the secular, inevitably produces the dualism and tension, the "hypocrisy" in the New Testament sense of the word, which Macmurray rightly condemns. But so long as the Church, and the churches, maintain this character and claim not without justice that they represent if not the ideal yet certainly the most effective Christian witness, it is hardly possible for any of us to recover a true appreciation of Christian love and community. If we remain in the institution, loyalty to it sets up barriers against full fellowship with our unattached neighbours: if we stand outside it, we are driven into a self-conscious aloofness from the public worship and witness of Christendom and exposed to the dangers of pietism, superciliousness, and sectarianism. To realise the place of community in the gospel, to experience the need and the value of it, to fail to find it in the Church, to be convinced that while the Church maintains its traditional character it cannot express community, and be equally convinced of the dangers and probable futility of seeking community elsewhere—this is a dilemma very familiar to most of us.

Historically of course the dilemma is as old as the distortion that creates it. When Christianity accepted the *damnosa hereditas* of the Empire, the monastic life provided an escape for those who revolted against the "power politics" of ecclesiasticism. In the great Orders, unnatural as their celibate and enclosed life might be, men found a communal experience in which a religion of brotherhood, of worship and service, could be practised. Christendom was preserved through the dark ages by its monks; culture was saved from destruction; evangelism was made possible; the life of the Spirit survived. The contrast between "the Way" in the first two centuries

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and the way as ordered by Benedict or the later movements is obvious. Spontaneity had given place to discipline; the hallowing of the world to its renunciation; the family to the monastery. The shape and character of community were distorted in accordance with the distortions of attitude towards nature and history. But limited, defective, dysgenic as it might be, here was evidence of the value of community and a noble attempt to achieve it. The "religious" were not unworthy of their name.

But even so in periods of vital development like those which began in the thirteenth century the Christian impulse found expression not in the hierarchical Church or in the monastic orders, but in fellowships created independently. Franciscans and Dominicans, Albigenses and Waldensians, alike illustrate the failure of Christendom to express and enable community. If the two former were tolerated and exploited, and the two latter persecuted and suppressed, their treatment in both cases reveals how impossible it was for the Church to break away from the rigidity and error of its own organisation. Hussites, Lollards, Anabaptists, Moravians, Quakers testify to the dilemma to which the failure of the Church to meet the need for community drove mankind. Those who were constrained to rebel against the Church's denial of liberty and equality, its acquiescence in social injustice, its scramble for power, its perversion of the gospel, were driven into the creation of societies whose compulsory separateness made it impossible for them to achieve a full freedom or to effect a reconciling ministry. The story of the Methodist movement in the Church of England reveals the difficulty of reforming the traditional institutions from within and of avoiding a measure of distortion when driven out. In more recent times the

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origin of the Oxford Movement in the Senior Common Room at Oriel or of Christian Socialism in the group gathered round F. D. Maurice illustrates a similar process. In Europe where the influence of the traditional Christian institutions is still strong, these groups have usually aimed rather at the reform of the Church from within than at separation from it and the formation of new societies; and on the whole the Church has been more ready to tolerate them than it was in the past—although the Modernist movement in the Roman Church, inspired by Tyrrell and Loisy, was condemned and suppressed by authority. In America where there is less respect for conservatism and greater enthusiasm for change, groups appearing and developing an independent existence have produced an almost bewildering variety of sects.

It is not necessary to examine, even so briefly as we have done in regard to science and history, the recovery of a sense of organic community in protest against the power-politics and caste-distinctions of the traditional Church. The story of the Quakers whose Society is the most radical and effective example of this protest is too well known and its influence too widely acknowledged to need emphasis here. Plainly, the signal achievements of the Friends, the religious quality of their lives and the devoted energy of their service, must compel any traditionalist to question and revise his convictions. It cannot be true that sacraments in the ecclesiastical sense are indispensable, that credal formularies must be enforced, or that a clerical order, episcopal or otherwise, is of the essence of the Church, if the fruit of the Spirit is displayed more manifestly in a Society which rejects these ordinances than in any other Christian denomination.

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To say, as some churchmen have said, that Quakers are not within the Church, may be legitimate; to deny that they are living members of the body of Christ, is to commit the "blasphemy against the Holy Ghost." Yet if so the Church cannot claim to be Christ's body in any full or monopolistic sense; and those who are concerned with its welfare will be guilty of hypocrisy if they do not recognise the fact and set themselves to eliminate their claims to exclusive prestige. We may believe, as I certainly do, that the acceptance of a sacramental view of life such as the Friends conspicuously adopt is better expressed by maintaining the representative character of the Apostolic Sacraments than by rejecting them because they have been traditionally used with an exclusive significance; that even if the test of fruits is the only criterion of discipleship and creeds have been employed rather as ring-fences than as finger-posts, yet the formulation of the Christian faith is essential to fulness of life and need not result in heresy-hunting; that an ordered ministry with definite training for its function in the body is not inconsistent with the freedom and equality of the members; that in fact *abusus non tollit usum*. But we can hardly deny, are indeed bound to acknowledge, that the protest of the Quakers draws attention to real exaggerations and compels the traditional Church to repent of its narrowness and amend if not its institutions at least the spirit in which they are maintained.

Of the gravity of the present situation there can be no sort of doubt. An organism if it is to survive must be able to adapt itself to its environment; and the environment does not remain unchanging. If form and structure lose their elasticity, the organism not only ceases to grow but is in danger of death. It is an anachronism, a



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survival, a potential fossil without value in the present or hope for the future. By its insistence that its dogmas are irreformable and its constitution sacrosanct, the Church invites such a fate; and if most denominations assert that they make no claims to infallibility and are eager for reasonable reforms, the assertion is hardly consistent with their practice. The records of the Lambeth Appeal, the Malines Conversations, the Lausanne Conference, and the Reunion Movement in general do not give much encouragement. The Church seems concerned rather with its safety than with its mission, with its traditions than with truth, with its processes than with its results: and these are not signs of health or youth.

The story of the Œcumenical Movement is a good illustration of our contention that the rigidity of the Church's structure is the chief obstacle to its recovery of vigour. The Movement first became prominent in the great Missionary Council at Edinburgh in 1910.<sup>1</sup> In the work of evangelism the need for co-operation had become irresistible. The more far-sighted missionaries realised the disastrous effects of indoctrinating their converts with Western sectarianism, and in confronting heathenism had recovered something of the proportion of the faith. Their readiness to concentrate upon the primary tenets of the gospel and to modify or reject the secondary and largely accreted elements in the European tradition disclosed how superficial and obstructive was much that their denominations at home wished to perpetuate. The example of Edinburgh was taken up by men of vision

<sup>1</sup>Previous efforts had been made in the Bible Society, the World's Evangelical Alliance, the Y.M.C.A., the W.S.C.F., etc.: but they influenced few outside Protestant circles and the Anglo-Saxon peoples. The story of the Œcumenical movement is told from a strongly American standpoint by C. S. Macfarland, *Steps towards the World Council*.

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in America who initiated the Faith and Order movement which strove to challenge the Church as to the grounds of its disunion. The war and the slowness of Europe to respond gave opportunity to Archbishop Söderblom, working upon foundations already laid in Britain and America, to extend the Edinburgh precedent to the sphere of the Church's social witness; and the first Conference on Life and Work was held at Stockholm in 1925. Here there was disclosed much less agreement than in dealing with missionary problems: but the obstacles to co-operation were rather theological and ecclesiastical than practical and ethical. Agreement could not be reached without trenching upon the problems of Faith and Order. Stockholm waited for Lausanne. In 1926 the third of the great Conferences revealed the real causes of disunion, and unfortunately did little to remove them. It was not difficult to agree to a common acceptance of Scriptures and even of the Nicene Creed: sacraments raised difficulties with the Quakers: but it was over the question of the ministry that the Conference found itself frustrated. So long as the more Catholic churches insisted that episcopacy was essential, those who rejected this claim, even if they regarded the whole question as secondary and relatively unimportant, could not give way without seeming to deny the validity of their own work. So long as the non-episcopal churches seemed in some cases to identify the Church with an aggregate of individual believers, those who realised that community was essential to the gospel even if they did not insist upon a particular theory of Holy Orders preferred to accept the traditional constitution as safeguarding the nature of the Church. It may be doubted whether strictly religious issues were the real cause of

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disagreement. Certainly vested interests, conservatism and prejudice played a large part. At any rate the difficulties were unsurmounted.

Since that time there has been a considerable movement towards agreement as to the character and significance of the Church; and it was hoped that in 1937 when the two Conferences at Oxford and Edinburgh were held, the Faith and Order Movement might make more progress. Doctrinally its acceptance of a united statement on Grace fulfilled expectations, but even so it was impossible to reach any practical results; the proposal for an Œcumenical Council, enthusiastically approved at Oxford, was heavily criticised; the deadlock over Orders was maintained; and in spite of the intense gravity of the situation in Europe and the paramount need for Christian unity in face of it the hierarchies, Orthodox, Anglican, Presbyterian or Congregationalist, remained adamant in support of their prestige.

Here then would seem to be the crux of our problem. The Church has the opportunity, and is discovering the necessity, to revise its traditional attitude towards nature and history. But this attitude was, as we have seen, embodied in an ecclesiastical structure which despite the Reformation still maintains its general characteristics. So long as the Church by all its chief denominations is regarded as in effect a supernatural State whose organisation follows the lines of secular politics, any radical reform is impeded if not wholly obstructed. The form of the Church prevents it from adapting itself to its modern environment: the old bottles can no longer contain the new-old wine of the gospel.

That is a conclusion which it is hard for any churchman to accept. Even if he finds, as I have certainly found,

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that the most sincere, intelligent and religious members of the younger generation reluctantly admit it, he will strive to hold fast to the belief that under the tension of the times and in the melting-pot of war the life still entombed in the traditional organisations will have power to modify and re-shape them. But such hope is not easy. For each repeated challenge seems only to drive the Church still further along the path of safety and escape. Leadership passes increasingly into the hands of those who are content to maintain the tradition, who identify the preservation of the deposit with the work of the ministry, and find excuse in doctrines of eschatology which scarcely mask despair. Meanwhile those who could bring gifts of vision and power to the task of re-shaping the structure are driven into other spheres of service and find expression for their discipleship in less anachronistic communities. It may be that God will forgive us; that as we gain a deeper sense of need, His Spirit will break down the obstinate conservatism which cherishes the outward form at the expense of the true substance; that even now when every tradition is feeling the pressure of adversity a new birth is preparing. But the signs of the times, so far as we can read them, do not give much encouragement. It seems more likely that the purpose of God will be fulfilled rather in those freer fellowships which are everywhere existing though at present few and weak, than in the organised denominations which cannot by their very structure give expression to the fulness and proportion of the faith.

To such forebodings, as to our contention that the Church cannot be organised after the pattern of an empire or a nation, the objection will naturally be raised that only by such government can human society be regulated,

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order maintained and justice administered. To claim that religion must concern itself with the whole range of affairs, secular as well as sacred, and at the same time to repudiate for the Church the right to equip itself with the constitutional system appropriate to its task is to ask the impossible. A theocracy, such as the great popes strove to establish, might assume the functions of world-wide control: that is a practicable, even if history suggests that it is an unsatisfactory, policy. The alternative would seem to be either a division of sphere between Church and State, each assuming responsibility in its proper realm; or the reduction of the Church to the level of an unorganised and private association which would inevitably withdraw its members from political life and accept the position of the Christian community under the Cæsars.

At a time when new types of government have been adopted by so many of the great peoples of the world, when totalitarian organisation has transformed the life of Russia, Italy and Germany, and when the countries still holding to a nominally democratic system are manifestly threatened, the need to re-examine the status and character of Christian organisation requires no justification. That totalitarianism is necessarily incompatible with any survival of the Church except in the form of small and suspect cells is a conclusion easy to argue. "We have no king but Cæsar" would seem to be the necessary confession both of Communists and of Fascists; and such confession involves a crucifying of Christ. The avowed atheism of Russia, the anti-Christian training of the youth in Germany, the precariousness of the Concordat in Italy, are obvious evidences of the threat to Christendom. Under such systems it would seem only a question

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of time before the Church is forced to betake itself again to the catacombs. Nor in a world so shrunken can the states that still keep their traditional governments hope to remain unaffected. If in them there is at present little likelihood of an avowed dictatorship, the cry for national unity, for the mobilisation of personnel and resources, and for the concentration of power in the hands of the small group that controls finance, policy and propaganda is increasingly insistent. The Church may evade the challenge for a time, if it is ready to take its orders from the national executive. But to do so will be to preserve the semblance of its structure at the expense of successive betrayals of its mission. Sooner or later for Christian individuals if not for Christian institutions the choice between Christ and Cæsar will become inescapable. Those who remember how eagerly churchmen in all countries turned themselves into recruiting officers and helped to organise the will to victory in the Great War,<sup>1</sup> will view with dismay the present tendencies in Britain and to a less degree in America.

On the surface such a prospect seems reasonable. He would be a bold man (or a very foolish one) who would predict anything but a period of eclipse for organised and institutional Christianity. Even if with Professor Macmurray he insists that all things contrary to the intention of God as manifested in Jesus are self-frustrating and doomed to failure, he would regard Dr. Maritain's expectation of survival by way of "cells" and a remnant as the probable means of deliverance. For the institutions are as we have argued defective and distorted representa-

<sup>1</sup>Graham Wallas, *Our Social Heritage*, pp. 253-84, gives a vivid and unanswerable record of the Church's Cæsarism.

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tives of "the community of the Holy Spirit"; they are no longer capable of adaptation to their environment; and they refuse with blind obstinacy to re-shape their presentation of the faith precisely at the point where reform affects organisation. The writing on the wall is manifest: has not the Church set its seal to it?

Before accepting that conclusion there is, I believe, good ground for hesitation. The upheavals and discontents expressed in State and Church alike, even if temporarily they have taken forms that threaten the existence of Christendom as we have known it for the past fifteen hundred years, spring out of conditions which are not in themselves antagonistic to the gospel as the Apostles proclaimed it. The economic and racial theories which underlie Marxism and Nazism are exaggerations—from the Christian standpoint indeed perversions—of a legitimate desire to do justice to history and to biology: but they are not to be condemned by the Church without an acknowledgment of its own penitence, since it is the Christian failure to maintain its own inherent gospel that has produced them. They are in this sense judgments of God upon the errors of His Church—a nemesis upon it for centuries of distorted teaching. Moreover they plainly testify a power to meet the needs of large numbers of human beings; for, if we in the democratic countries see only the cruelty, spoliation and persecution that have accompanied them, there is especially in Russia but also in Germany and Italy a real increase of zest for life, creative energy and fellowship, and a radical reform of injustices and social evil. Movements which have produced a sense of solidarity, discipline and enthusiasm, which have gone far in Russia and some distance elsewhere to remove class-barriers and give the depressed

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a sense of citizenship and co-operation and to raise the cultural level of the population, cannot be dismissed as wholly diabolical. At least they bear witness in a world in danger of being crushed by its own machinery to the power of mankind to reconstitute its way of life, to carry out great programmes of reform and to respond to the influence of leaders in whom they see their ideals personified. However much we may detest certain of their activities, however convinced we are that their ideals are inadequate, we cannot fail to compare their achievements with the divisions, the defeatism and the consequent ineffectiveness of Christendom. If false ideologies can produce such vitality, we who claim to be children of light stand rebuked. The *a fortiori* argument so frequent in the teaching of Jesus ought to bring us humbled to our knees. If we cannot say, as the prophets of Israel said, that God has raised up Stalin or Hitler for our chastisement, at least we can learn something of our failure and perhaps of the means for our recovery.

There is indeed abundant evidence in the achievements of the Apostolic age that the gospel produced a quality of life, individual and corporate, marked by singleness of purpose and creative energy, and that this life permeated and reformed a materialistic and seemingly invincible society. Despite its distortion of the gospel the Church has revealed from time to time through the centuries an amazing capacity for resurrection, when men and women, often of lowly station and without resources, have rediscovered the secret of Pentecost.

Particularly has this been the case in those periods of transition when the established order was breaking up under the impact of new discoveries or the revival of lost hopes. In times of bewilderment and turmoil when



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nation rises against nation and men's hearts are fainting for fear, there is good reason to look for a fresh manifestation of the Son of Man, a fresh achievement of Christian community. That the world is ready for such a resurrection is clear from the enthusiasm which defective gospels, the apocalypticism of the Communist or the racialism of the Nazi, have aroused. That the official churches show little sign of it need not be surprising; the Christ cometh not by observation but to simple folk in a stable. That it will come if the proper conditions are recognised and fulfilled is a conviction which no Christian will deny and which nature and history validate.

What then are the conditions? Primarily the expectation, the divine discontent, the readiness for faith and adventure, the sense of crisis and urgency, of which the eschatology of Apocalyptic is the classical expression. Only when men are aroused to a realisation of the tremendous issues at stake, only when the tension of life becomes intolerable and the day of judgment draws near and decisions that involve life or death have to be taken, do the majesty and significance of God break in upon the prison-house of our mortality. Mankind easily settles down into a complacent acceptance of selfish satisfactions, is prone to exchange its spiritual birthright for a mess of pottage, and needs the sharp surgery of calamity in order to recover health of soul and a knowledge of its true vocation. The immense enrichment of physical resources during the past century has given to the privileged classes and to some extent to all our folk in Europe and America abundant excuse for spending all their energies upon amusements, hobbies, business, culture of a purely worldly kind—activities not necessarily evil and therefore not offending the conscience, but dissipating the energies

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and distracting the unity of life. The seed of the Word of God, the impulse to wonder and worship, the desire for release from sin, are choked by the cares and pleasures of this life. Mankind gains the world and loses its own soul. Despite the great achievements of the nineteenth century it ended in a period of smug and shallow self-reliance which invited the nemesis of war. Now that the earth has been shaken and our confidence in our own security shattered, there is given back to us the fear of the Lord which is the beginning of wisdom. We stand again under judgment and in the presence of the "last days." Dr. Barth in recalling Christendom to the tremendous nature of the crisis has been a true prophet.

But to become aware of tension and judgment is only the first step. The specific Christian gospel consists in the revelation and discovery that the paradox has been resolved. The dualism which sets God and man, the supernatural and the natural, the sacred and the secular in antithesis has been as we have shown freely introduced into the traditional teaching of the Church. It involves an essential distortion, indeed a denial, of the basic faith of Christendom—the belief that in Christ God and man are truly one. The language of the Creeds, "two natures in one person," reflects a metaphysic inappropriate to our day; and the materialistic and chemical metaphors whereby the Fathers strove to expound their formula cannot do justice to the character of the union. But such language testifies to a conviction that the riddle of duality has been answered, that God and the realm of nature and history are not irreconcilable, and that mankind can live here and now with God in the world. It is precisely this consciousness of the emergence of a new and integrating synthesis, expressed not only in a

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message but in a way of life, that gives its significance and power to the New Testament. In Christ men enter into the creative, incarnational and redemptive fellowship of the Spirit of God.

The four terms of the last sentence represent as is obvious the four primary doctrines which together express an integral and coherent Christian experience. To treat the four independently is, as all students of dogmatics are aware, to imperil the proportion of the faith. God as Creator is not different from God as Incarnate: between Incarnation and Atonement there is no real disparity: the activity of the Holy Spirit is not a separate and subsequent manifestation—without it creation becomes carpentry, incarnation theophany, atonement fantasy. Popular tritheism and the traditional treatment of doctrines in isolation perpetuate errors which as we have seen arose when the Christian valuation of nature, history and community was rejected. To apprehend the wholeness of the faith, even if a full formulation of it is beyond our power, is to find the tension resolved and the expectation fulfilled.

Such an apprehension is at present unattained and perhaps unattainable not so much because the doctrines of creation, incarnation, and atonement are dislocated as because since very early times the doctrine of the Holy Spirit has been ignored; and it has been ignored because the characteristic experience of *agape* and *koinonia* which underlies it has been lost. That is the plain fact, which emerges from our examination of the process by which the *kerygma* was distorted. The integral coherence of the faith involves a theology of the Spirit; the development of Christian personality depends upon response to the Spirit: and this essential element in the Christian

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gospel has never since the Apostolic age been given adequate emphasis. Teaching on the subject has been formal, ecclesiastical, unreal; experience where it has been manifested has been regarded either as madness or as sainthood—in either case as something abnormal and suspect; community, though maintained for a few centuries and revived from time to time in special groups and fellowships of believers, has been replaced in the Church by organisation and officialdom.

To restore a true appreciation of the Holy Spirit in the proportion of the faith is admittedly the most urgent of all tasks for the Christian thinker. So much has been freely recognised ever since Dr. Swete devoted his first and last work<sup>1</sup> to the subject. What is less generally known is the scope of the necessary inquiries. If we are to discuss the place of the Spirit in the doctrine of creation, we must investigate the relation of the manifestation in Scripture and Church to the energy revealed in the evolutionary process, and decide whether we are to ascribe the march of life and the emergence of value to the same divine source as is acknowledged at Pentecost or in the sacraments. If we are to consider the Spirit in relation to incarnation, the psychology of inspiration and the extent to which this provides a clue to an understanding of the person of the Incarnate will have to be studied; for unless the experience of the saints gives us some analogy to that of Christ, our assertions about Him become pure mythology. So too with the atonement, if this means a real union of believers with one another in God, then the phenomena of group consciousness and the psychological realities that lie behind the

<sup>1</sup>*The Early History of the Doctrine of the Holy Spirit and The Holy Spirit in the Ancient Church.*

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language of organic fellowship will require full examination: we must learn the conditions under which men "of one heart and of one soul"<sup>1</sup> can be incorporated into true community. Until such researches have been developed it seems impossible to lay down the lines for a doctrine of the Holy Spirit or even to discover the extent to which our present doctrinal system is defective.

To say that the Church must recover a synthetic and balanced theology by developing its doctrine of the Holy Spirit is to state the matter too simply. Experience must precede formulation; and we know too little of the scope and quality of community to have the data for its effective interpretation. A world rent by conflicts of race and class and sex; a Church which has accepted and sanctioned these conflicts and added to them its own sectarian rivalries; these do not provide material for communal sympathies or an integrative way of life.

Yet the task, by its very difficulty, becomes at once worthier of effort and more likely of fulfilment. For the first time in history the age-old denial of liberty and equality to large sections of society is being challenged, and men have become conscious of the need for radical reform of the social order. Mass-production in industry, if it has replaced men by machines and made the relationship between employers and employed increasingly inhuman, has created a reaction against the mechanisation of life and won for the workers leisure to develop wider interests and communal activities. Art which, in spite of those<sup>2</sup> who seem to regard aesthetic gifts as the perquisite of the cultured few, expresses perhaps more truly

<sup>1</sup>Acts iv. 32.

<sup>2</sup>cf., e.g., Roger Fry, *Vision and Design*.

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than politics or industry the character of an epoch, if at present its reaction against convention is often anarchic and sometimes insincere, shows a real concern for freedom and movement, for experiment and the interpretation of personality. No one can pretend that the signs of the times indicate much ground for hope: but the evidence of the desire for a simpler, franker and more friendly way of living is not negligible; and if that desire could be guided into clear and creative channels, a recovery of fellowship might yet be made.

To recover it upon a basis deeper and more universal than loyalty to the proletariat or the nation or to blood and soil is a matter of life and death if the advocates of peace, democracy and world-unity are not to be overwhelmed by the energy generated in Communist, Fascist and Nazi States. If we in Britain and America are not to see our ideals condemned to destruction or to suicide, we shall require changes in our way of life hardly less drastic than those which have been effected in Russia, Italy and Germany. Capitalism has ignominiously failed; for we possess all the necessities for wealth, raw materials, machinery, labour and yet mankind starves in the midst of plenty. Democracy has not yet been attained; our present so-called democratic systems produce neither statesmanship nor representation of the people. Specialisation, necessitated by the vast increase of knowledge and enforced by economic pressure and cut-throat competition, is producing a race incapable of an integral outlook upon life or of relating individual interests to the common weal. Consequently we cannot even control, much less remedy, the evils created by financial exploitation, political opportunism and anarchic selfishness. Corporate life, as we know it, is more akin to the crowd

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with its irrational responses of fear and hate, or to the committee of delegates, each striving to get his own way or if that is impossible to prevent others from getting theirs, than to any higher form of human fellowship. We desire community: little groups gathered everywhere sometimes experience foretastes of it; but in public life it is manifestly unattained.

We all desire community; the Church professes to display and enable it; and at moments, in acts of worship and at Christmas, a glimpse of its meaning is disclosed. But it is only too evident that its character and the conditions of its attainment are not understood and that in consequence the emotion which lifts us out of solitariness, unites us in a bond of sympathetic intimacy and inspires us with a wish for fellowship, is transitory and disappointing. Yet Christendom possesses in the records of the Apostolic age the example of what community can be and achieve; and by understanding those records should be able to explain and to renew the experience that they describe.

How then is community, the *koinonia* of the Holy Spirit, to be attained? The answer to such a question is not difficult to state, however hard it may be to follow. Three conditions have to be fulfilled. First, the members must be individually dominated and integrated by a common loyalty, such as Christ can evoke and sustain; secondly they must have the will and the means to express that loyalty in action, in the service of His world-wide commission; finally, they must be united as persons by mutual trust, sympathy and friendship, by the *agape* which binds them into an organic whole. Given these conditions the fellowship exercises a creative power vastly beyond what the members separately can attain.

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The interplay of the individuals, far from distracting, enriches the energy of the whole. Results are achieved for which no one of them can claim credit, and which transcend the expectation and imagination of any. They can be, as St. Paul declared and the mystics have dreamed, to the Spirit of God what his hands and feet are to a man. Such fellowship, which is utterly different alike from the animalism of the mob and from the compromises of a committee, is the sole hope and justification of democracy, as it is the inward grace and true nature of the Church. Those of us who have experienced it, even if imperfectly, know that it is of all human relationships the most dynamic and satisfying.

A common loyalty, a common service, a common love: Christendom has found the two former relatively easy; the last is the new and essential commandment, and it has been too hard for us. Yet without it art, science, ethics profit us nothing; and the gospel loses its proportion and its power. The love of God, His love for which no man can bargain and of which no man is worthy, can set men free from every vestige of self-esteem: "God's gift of Himself is the one all-sufficient motive of the Christian life."<sup>1</sup> But by itself it involves a quietism which may ultimately become a self-regarding desire for absorption and for reward. To enjoy God for ever is hardly distinguishable from the ambition for individual salvation, which inevitably leaves us still unemancipated from self. Even when expressed in service our enjoyment of Him hardly escapes a subtle sense of superiority and merit. The egoism *à deux* which makes religion pharisaical may protest that its service is all for God: but if it is not

<sup>1</sup>J. Burnaby, *Amor Dei*, p. 183. The concluding chapter of this book, pp. 301-18, contains an impressive exposition of the quality and proportion of love.



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accompanied by love of those whom it would serve, a love which reflects towards men a selflessness similar to that achieved by the love of God, it can only exploit them or sentimentalise over them, and is itself tainted with selfishness. Only as the individual finds his true freedom in the fellowship of those who share with him the one love and the one service can he look to receive that gift which fulfilled and transcended the hope of Israel, and was the hall-mark of Apostolic Christianity, the gift of the Holy Spirit.



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